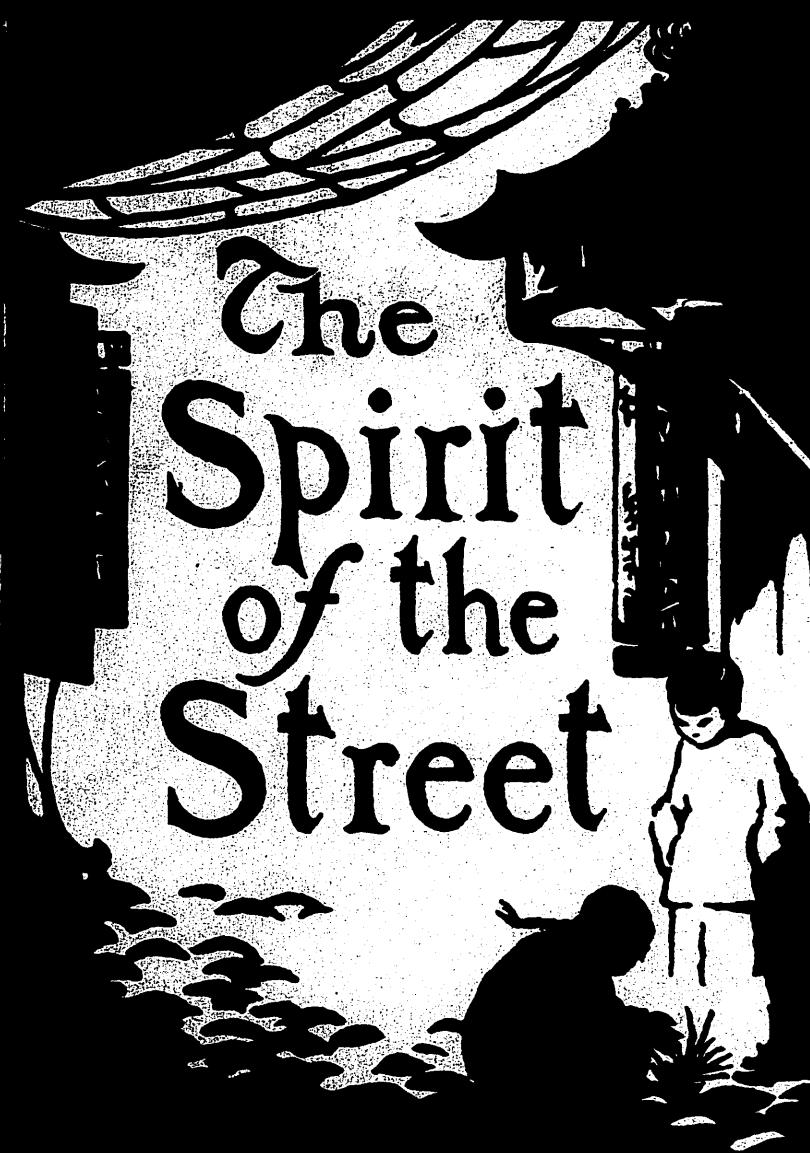




The Spirit of the Street

Priscilla Holton

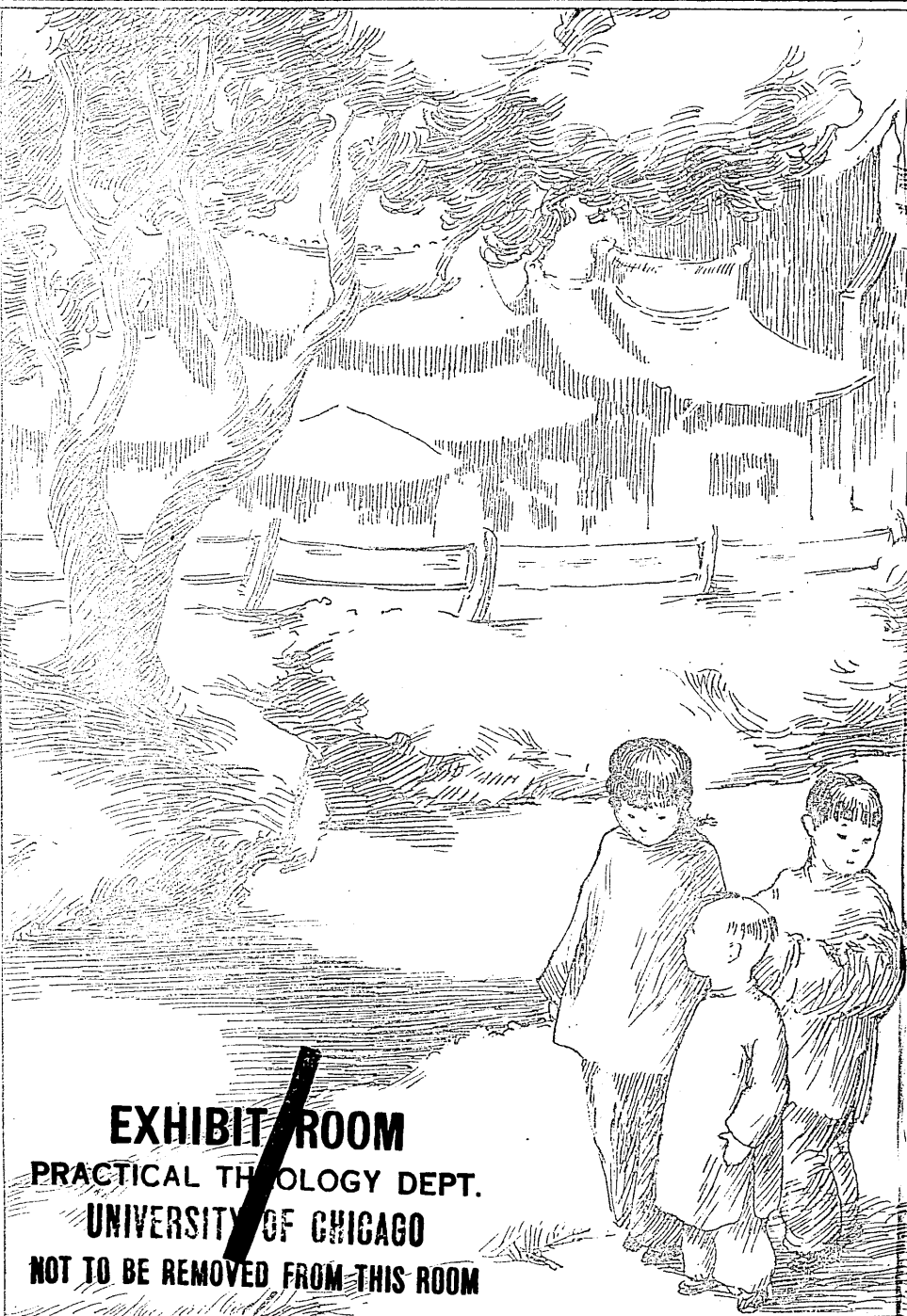


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THE SPIRIT OF THE STREET

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THE SPIRIT OF THE STREET

PRISCILLA HOLTON
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GERTRUDE HERRICK

THE PILGRIM PRESS
BOSTON CHICAGO

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Printed in the United States of America

THE JORDAN & MORE PRESS
BOSTON

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Dedication

To my "CLOSE STUDENTS"

OF

WEN SHAN GIRLS SCHOOL

WHOSE

SHY AFFECTION AND DELICATE SYMPATHY

FIRST INSPIRED ME

TO

THE SPIRIT OF THE STREET

FOREWORD

"To those who seek —"

The true call of China is not that of the great open spaces, awe-inspiring and untouched though they are. It is rather the thrill one feels walking through her dusk-clad streets at night, when dirt and filth and poverty are temporarily hid; when men cease their work to sit at their doorsteps to weave melodies on crude flutes, while women folk hold their babies. The spirit that moves it all — the Spirit of the Street — is the children of China, some of them laughing and rosy, but so many of them pinched and sad, with faces a century old. Often at night as you ride by in a 'ricksha, you see them, these children of the street — a young apprentice still finishing his day's work by a dim oil lamp; small boys gambling their last bit of *cash*; or a diminutive little slave-sister, gathering piles of incense to burn before a shop door. An omen for good luck, most people will explain this latter custom, but always when I have watched those children, their faces for the moment alive and joyous as

a child's should be — yet wistful too — I have felt as though they were seeking (as I *know* the schoolchildren do) for that true Spirit of the Street, whose protection and love they so much need. After all, it is these children that must bear the real struggle in China's present search for freedom. *They* are the ones whose rice bowl is emptied by marauding soldiers, whose education must be stopped by civil war. They go to school eagerly, when they can, and learn new ideals. They return home bound to it by China's unchanged law of loyalty to the family, changing in theory, but not yet in practice. In *Six and Seven* I have said: "It was the same old problem of a heathen home and a Christian school and one poor lone child, bound to both." Many of these stories (written except for "Big Feet" about the province of Fukien) are so true they may seem to lack plot. Even those that are not true word by word, are bits of truth pieced together.

For those who can never walk China's streets at dusk, and for those who have walked through them in the ugly market-hour and feel disillusioned, and for those last who, having lived close to the true spirit of China, know her and love her at all hours — to all of you, I offer these

children of my spirit that they may help you to think of China not as some vast and troubled country only, but as one whose every road and home and school is filled with children like Ai Hua and Kai Ding and Heng-E.

PRISCILLA HOLTON.

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LITTLE EVER MORE FRAGRANT

The Spirit of the Street

LITTLE EVER MORE FRAGRANT

Little Ever More Fragrant had just finished tying a bit of red yarn on her smooth black pig-tails. Her hair was unusually well combed. The part was exactly in the middle of her head, the braids were shining and even. Not only that, but her eyes sparkled as though something of great importance and especial joy were about to happen. Always, to be sure, Ever More Fragrant was full of cheer, but this morning her face shone as though she were the possessor of some precious secret.

She heard her mother rattling the rice bowls so she ran out to help. There were the chopsticks, the bowls and the spoons to be set in place. After breakfast the dishes must be washed. Besides, it was a great and constant care to see that no harm befell Always Precious, her small brother, who was continually bumping his head or his nose on his toys. It was such a busy morning that afternoon came before she had time to sweep the floor and put fresh flowers in the ancient vases. Perhaps it was because she was so busy and so quiet that her father and mother failed to notice how hard she was working, or how happy she was.

Once she sang a queer little tune as she skipped across the floor, so that her mother paused to look at her and said: "Why do you sing so merrily? The sky has grown dark and the winter cold is settling down on us. There is little joy in the world with your brother crying all the day because his teeth are new. And few come to buy the combs of your father's shop, now that so many men have come into the neighborhood to steal the secret of his trade. Why do you sing?"

Little Ever More Fragrant was squatting on the floor to pick up the thin scraps of paper that her broom would not catch, so for a moment she kept discreetly silent. Then her father spoke from the shop door:

"And why do you sweep so carefully today? And why are there fresh flowers in the vases when the yellow ones of yesterday were still good? Is it not enough to buy flowers once in the week? These red ones are gaudy."

It was quite true. The chrysanthemums were still not wilted, but Ever More Fragrant had removed them in favor of some bright red cocks-combs. Still she hesitated before answering, until by the silence which had fallen she knew she could wait no longer. She looked up from her sweeping and smiled her smile of secret joy again, as she said: "Why, today it is that Glori-

ously Fragrant comes home for three long days. She will bring us stories from the school and a gift, perhaps, for Always Precious. And her school, she says, is clean, so we must make ready to welcome her."

"Then tomorrow," said her father, "she can help me in the shop and tell me new styles to make."

"Oh, and the stories she will tell!" cried Ever More Fragrant. "For this, you know, is their big feast day and all the lovely things have come to them from America. There will be gifts for everyone."

"Now, now," fussed her father, "don't fill your head with all these strange notions your sister has learned; for you know little as it is that is worth while. Ah me! ah me!" he continued, "the weather grows so bitter these days that my hands are stiff with it, and I can scarcely make my fingers move."

"And I have a cold in my head," said her mother, "so that I feel most wretched. And Always Precious has only a cotton cap to keep him warm."

But Ever More Fragrant rubbed her hands briskly and continued to smile as she worked. It was almost dark when she had finished and had gathered her sticks of incense to burn before the shop to the Spirit of the Street.

In the meantime at the school there was the great holiday. Gloriously Fragrant was so happy she had not spent much time thinking about her little sister. For Christmas was near. It was really coming at last. All the nights when she had been poring over her books and struggling with different lessons were forgotten in the joy of the holiday. During the last few weeks, in her spare moments, she had been knitting a warm woolen cap for Always Precious from some scraps of bright yarn a teacher had given her. The cap was well made and Gloriously Fragrant had reason to be proud of it. Her schoolmates had admired it until they were fairly envious of its vivid splendor. She had made handkerchiefs, too, for a few of her special friends, and the stitches were worked with great care. So Gloriously Fragrant had been busy. "For," she thought, "should I receive a handkerchief from any of the girls, I should be most sorrowful were the gift more carefully sewed."

The night of the party came. The rooms were bright with poinsettias and bells and candles. In a place of great prominence blazed the Christmas tree, as bulgingly full as a Christmas stocking. Truly, the spirit of happiness was in every nook and corner of the room. Carols were sung. One of them Gloriously Fragrant loved

especially. It was soft and lovely, about a holy night. It seemed when she sang it as though her throat would burst, although indeed the words were sung with great gentleness. Then there were the gifts. She had expected a handkerchief, to be sure, but when she opened the square package and saw the exquisitely embroidered flowers on it, she was filled with great joy and amazement. Actually, the flowers looked so real, she leaned over to see if she could catch their fragrance. Never had she had anything for herself which was so lovely. She ran quickly to the girl who had made it to thank her.



"Why," she cried, "it is the loveliest gift you could have made for me! How did you ever sew so beautifully?"

"Because," answered her schoolmate shyly, "as I made it, I thought of you; and all the time I was putting the color into the flowers, I remembered how fragrant you are, and how always you seem to give your own self to others. So that is why the flowers look so real. It is because they are like you."

Gloriously Fragrant had no answer for this, so she smiled her happiness instead, and ran back as she heard her name called again. This time, to her great astonishment, she received a long narrow package. She thought of everything, as she untied the cord which bound it — pencils, a comb, paints, a ruler — and then off came the paper, and there was a pair of warm wristlets. The yarn was as bright and as artistically blended as her own little cap. The wristlets were smoothly knit too, so that when she put them on they did not prick her wrists or scratch them. They were the gift of a girl at school who owned few bits of loveliness herself. Even this yarn had been given her for her own use.

"How nice and warm I shall be tomorrow, when I go home through the cold, wet streets," thought Gloriously Fragrant, "and how glad I

am that I have something just as fine to give to Always Precious!"

So the evening went. After all the presents had been received, and the thank-yous were said, one of the teachers began to tell the story of the Christ Child. So beautifully did she speak and so earnestly, that Gloriously Fragrant forgot as she listened that she was in the schoolroom with the rest of the girls, and for the moment she too was wandering down the streets of Bethlehem, following the light of the star until she came to the place where the baby Jesus lay. And as she thought, suddenly the face of her own brother came to her mind, making her smile softly to think that on the morrow she could be offering her gift of love to a baby boy.

The day for going home came. Good-bys were said and Christmas greetings were called out for the last time as the girls went through the school gate. Gloriously Fragrant had a long walk home. Her arms grew tired, and in spite of the warm, wristlets her fingers were cramped with cold. She had been carefully hugging her gifts: the handkerchief with its lifelike flowers, the gay knitted cap, and a small bundle of silk which she intended to use to make some gifts for next Christmas. It was the day that Ever More Fragrant had been so busy, preparing as

best she could for the homecoming of her older sister. But Gloriously Fragrant was too occupied with her own thoughts, as she approached her father's shop, to think very long about her little sister.

The farther she went from school and the nearer she came to her own home, the harder she thought. After all, it was not so easy! At school, where every one knew and loved the story of Christmas, where the flaming poinsettias and the fragrant fir-tree decorated the hall, it was all very natural and simple. Of course she wanted to tell her family the joy and wonder of it all, but how could she make them understand? They would admire her gifts, they would be pleased with the cap; but how could she ever make them see the meaning of the day itself, without any tree, without flowers, and without carols? For a minute, Gloriously Fragrant was tempted not to say anything at all, but to offer the gift to her little brother without any explanation. Then suddenly she remembered that before they had left school she had said with the rest, "Freely ye have received, freely give." Still it was hard, this giving, and as she turned down the street that led to her father's shop she felt sad and perplexed that she had nothing ready to tell them.

Little Ever More Fragrant had just finished

lighting the last stick of incense when she looked up to see her older sister standing near her. The child was so glad to see her that her breath almost stopped and she stayed kneeling on the dirty street.

"It is very late, little sister," said Gloriously Fragrant, as she leaned down to help her up, "too late for you to be outside in the cold."

"Perhaps it is," replied the child; "but see, I have lit the incense so the Spirit of the Street might bring you home in safety, and here you are. So I do not mind the cold."

"It is true, yes, the Spirit of the Street has protected me all the way. He guards me wherever I am; yet I burn no sacrifice to Him, save love and service," answered the older girl.

"I do not understand all that you say," puzzled Ever More Fragrant, "but I do know how glad I am to welcome you home, although you do not look as happy to be here as I am to see you. Come, let us go in, for the rice is warm, and there are red flowers to greet you, and Always Precious has a brand-new smile to show off his two front teeth." And so the sisters left the incense burning faintly as they went together into the house.

After supper had been eaten, the father turned to Gloriously Fragrant: "Your sister

has been waiting eagerly all day for you. She wishes to hear a story of the school. She was so glad you were coming that the cold weather scarcely touched her, while my hands are so numbed I find it hard to move them, and your mother is ill with a cold. Tell us, then, one of these stories that are charms against the winter and make work seem like play."

Gloriously Fragrant sat silent, realizing that now was the time to tell the story of the Christ. How should she begin? Her little sister was all excitement in her joy over hearing a story. Her mother, crooning the baby to sleep, was waiting patiently. Yet there she sat, wondering. Then the song she loved so at school seemed to run through her head persistently, until she said: "First, there is a song I might sing to you. It is about the birth of a little Boy, as round and as lovable and as sweet as Always Precious when he is being good. And the Baby was so wonderful that men came from afar to offer him gifts, just as I have come from school with a gift for Always Precious."

Then she ran to the back of the room, where she took the little cap, all carefully tied with the bright red ribbon, and handed the package to her mother, who cried out with such joy that she nearly wakened the baby.

"Oh, oh," sang Ever More Fragrant, "how lovely! Oh, how lovely! I knew, I knew you would have something for him. And tell us quickly what the story is. And the song — please sing the song!"

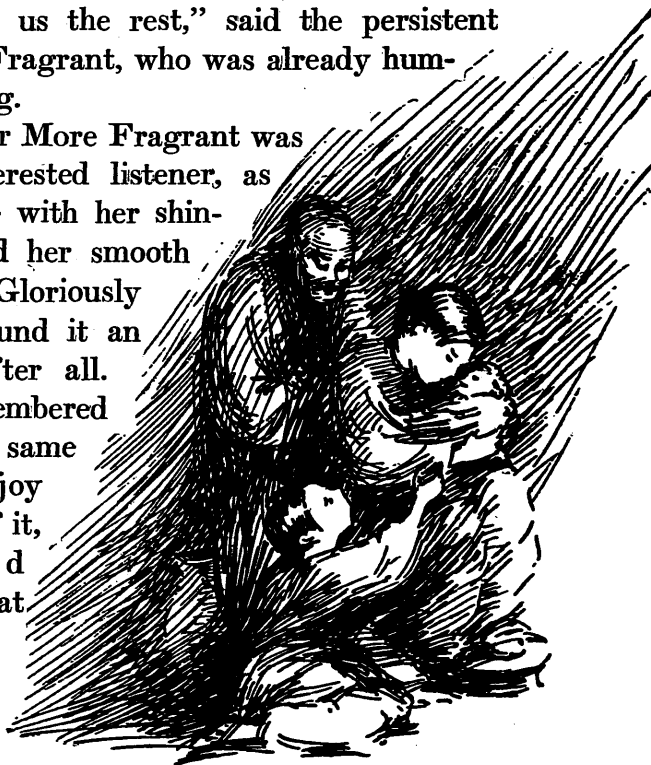
So while the family were admiring the reflection of the red yarn on Always Precious' cheeks, Gloriously Fragrant sang the song of the holy night.

"And is that all?" questioned her father, "the birth of a boy and the giving of gifts?"

"No, not all," answered the girl.

"Then tell us the rest," said the persistent Ever More Fragrant, who was already humming the song.

Little Ever More Fragrant was such an interested listener, as she sat there with her shining eyes and her smooth braids, that Gloriously Fragrant found it an easy tale after all. She remembered with the same wondering joy the marvel of it, as she had heard it told at



school, and she began to see that the story itself was so true, so great, that no matter how poorly or how simply it was told, people would always love to hear it.

When she had finished her father said, "So the Christians give presents on Christmas. That is interesting. Do they give that others will give to them, I wonder?"

"No, that is not the reason." Gloriously Fragrant spoke slowly as though she were thinking something strange and new to herself, even. "No, they give — they give because so much has been given to them already, and because they love to give. That is why I made this cap for Always Precious. For you I have some warm wristlets to keep your fingers warm, father. And for mother, there is a handkerchief with flowers embroidered in the corner, so real they look like living ones. Then for Ever More Fragrant —" she paused, trying to think what she had left to give, when her eyes caught the gleam of the silk she was going to use for the next Christmas. "Why, for Ever More Fragrant I have the stuff to make her a beautiful doll to play with when I am at school and Always Precious is asleep."

Almost before she knew what she was doing, she had parted with her entire store. A queer

little pain stuck in her throat as she saw her mother bending in frank astonishment over the handkerchief, and as she watched her father quickly drawing on the wristlets. Through her head went the sentence, "Freely ye have received, freely give." She was so intently wondering how she was going to explain to her friends that she failed to notice Ever More Fragrant slip out of her chair.

A few minutes later she came over to her older sister. In her hand was her most treasured possession, a wax flower, pink and green and yellow. It had been given to her nearly a year before and she loved it more than anything else she owned. It was, in fact, almost the one thing in the world which really belonged to her. She held out the flower to Gloriously Fragrant.

"Then," said she, "if the Christians give because they have received so much and because they love to give, here is my flower for you." And she dropped it into her sister's lap, to run back to her own little bundle of cloth that was now to become another precious possession.



THE WEDDING SLIPPERS



THE WEDDING SLIPPERS

Dusk had already begun to gather along the city wall, when Nguong Ling, a folding stool dangling from one arm, a tray of dried fruit on his head, joined his sister in the courtyard.

"Must you start so soon?" she questioned. "Our mother has not yet returned from the fields. Surely the crowds will not gather in the city until after the evening rice is eaten." She eyed the fruit raptly. "It *does* look tempting, Nguong Ling," she said wistfully.

"That is because you have made the tray so festive with its red and green lamps," he replied. "You always help my trade, Baik Ling. I don't see how I shall manage without you."

Baik Ling tried to laugh, but her eyes filled. "This is the Eve of the New Year, my brother. We must think only happy thoughts. Even though I shall be married so soon, you will not have to be without me, for I shall return home every single day. Dear knows, the time grows short enough when one thinks of the coats and skirts — and wedding slippers that I must prepare!"

In spite of her light tone, Nguong Ling was not deceived. He knew Baik Ling dreaded her approaching marriage. His heart twisted with pain. How he should miss her! Baik Ling who cooked his rice and darned his coats and made his mother and him forget the depth of their poverty since the bandits had carried off his father. Baik Ling who was only fifteen — to think they had been practically forced to sell her to the wealthy old farmer who would ruin her sweet spirit with his greedy ways. If she would complain once, even!

But that was not Baik Ling's way. She never admitted the fear that kept her awake night after night — the taunts her mother-in-law would shower upon her because she had used some of her husband's trousseau money to buy the family rice. She spoke quickly now.

"You must not look so sad, or no one will buy from you. Go now to the city. Remember to look at those slippers we saw last week, the blue satin ones with the pale green butterflies and plum blossoms embroidered on them. Good luck may be nearer than we know this night. May you bring home an empty tray and a heart of happiness for the new year. Slowly, slowly walk," she cautioned.

At the mention of the wedding slippers,

Nguong Ling winced again. He had wanted so to buy them for her! But that very morning his mother had startled them with the news that the wedding was to be two weeks sooner than they had thought. In vain the scant dollar he had saved. The slippers would cost over two.

He straightened his shoulders and faced toward the city. "All that you have said, I will remember," he promised. "Perhaps I shall return with my desire fulfilled. Who knows?" He reached the outer gate, calling back his last greeting: "Slowly, slowly, go in and sit down," he said.

His heart was heavy and his sadness thick as he neared the gay streets. Little good to call his wares or polish his fruit in such a crowd. Mechanically, however, as he neared the gates, he sang in a sharp falsetto,

"Olives — olives — green and brown,
Dates — dates — polished and round."

The crowds jostled him. Every one was out. His first customer, a small girl resplendent in scarlet and rouge, approached him with wide eyes. She selected delicately two salted dates while her father tossed the coins on the tray, calling, "May that begin your luck aright."

"Ho," taunted an urchin, "*his* luck is dreaming. He's too slow to sell much and too generous. He *gives* them away. Besides, every corner is already full tonight."

It was true. When he reached the most brilliant street with its red banners floating out from shop fronts, Nguong Ling couldn't find an available spot for his small stand. Venders were

everywhere. In the place usually recognized as his, an ancient toymaker sat bent over his work.

"Oh, ho, country boy," one of the children called gleefully, "you are too slow for city ways."

"There are bigger shops farther on," he laughed back at her.

The gayety



was infectious. When at last he found an empty place right opposite the shop where wedding slippers were sold, Nguong Ling was quite happy himself. He set up his stand, lowered the tray on to it, polished the wavering lamps and settled himself behind the fruit to enjoy the holiday sights.

A coolie, grabbing an olive as he dashed past, called out, "Collect the debt before morning or not at all."

Nguong Ling pushed back farther from the street, almost upsetting a slave child who was setting out the evening sacrifice.

"Are you preparing your evening rice?" he teased.

She regarded him seriously. "This is to please the Spirit of the Street," she answered, "to bring good luck to my master's shop."

Such dainties should bring *something*, Nguong Ling decided, as he watched her place bowls of cakes and stuffed cookies behind an even row of well-filled wine cups. As she heaped up incense and idol fire, she called, "Ding Ing, Ding Ing, all is ready."

A small boy shuffled out to set off a string of firecrackers from the burning paper. Good luck was certainly well invoked all around Nguong Ling. He forgot the thinness of his coat and of

his pocketbook until he saw a beautifully dressed girl enter the shoeshop. With apparent disdain, she pointed toward a pair of red brocaded slippers, gay with flowers. They were right next to Baik Ling's coveted choice.

"Oh," trembled Nguong Ling, "suppose —"

The girl was inspecting the red ones petulantly. "Not these," she cried, "they are too poor."

"Ah, could I stand there for two minutes — the money in my pocket —" the boy commented, "I should not worry the shopkeeper long. And Baik Ling would have one lovely thing on her wedding day, anyway."

He was smiling wistfully, forgetful of the garrulous crowds. Then he noticed two foreigners had paused to look at him. One was a lady with flying golden hair. She was laughing merrily as she nodded and gesticulated at the man beside her. He listened quietly but continued to lean on his lacquer cane.

"They can't be wanting my olives," decided the boy, "for all foreigners think them bitter. Still the laughing lady keeps pointing at them. She must be pleased at the way Baik Ling arranged the tray. What a deep pocket her coat has — and what *is* she doing?"

She pulled out a pad and pencil, nodding em-

phatically at the man, who shrugged his shoulders and moved nearer Nguong Ling. In Chinese, queerly accented, he explained to the wondering boy:

"The lady begs the honor of making a picture of your stand. She wishes to show her brother in America how the Chinese people buy their fruit. We have no such beautiful arrangements there. The people will be happy to see the customs of this country."

Nguong Ling bowed politely. "She honors me too much," he deprecated. "My tray is meager and small. Even the lamps are home-made. If she goes farther down the street, she will find more gorgeous displays."

The man interpreted, but the lady, still laughing, returned the bow and swept her hand beseechingly toward the tray. The man continued:

"No, she has looked everywhere. Yours pleases her the most because she likes your face. She wishes to draw it as you were when we interrupted your thoughts."

A strange request (these foreigners were queer folk), but an easy one. The thought of his patched trousers and faded coat would have embarrassed him, but he remembered instead Baik Ling's faithfulness in caring for them.

"This will please *her* anyway, and I can tell

her it was because they liked the lamps," he thought.

He consented shyly, then, centering his gaze once more on the haughty girl, who was still eyeing disdainfully the rows of silken footwear spread out on the counter, he watched sadly. Meanwhile a crowd was gathering around the foreign lady as she made swift lines across her paper. A policeman came, too. "What's all this?" he demanded gruffly. "Buy or move on."

Instantly hands went forth; olives were grabbed and coppers thrown hastily on the tray. The eager watchers were left in peace as long as they cupped peanuts into their mouths, or munched dates and olives. Nguong Ling, concentrating on the girl, scarcely noticed how his pile of money grew. He sighed with relief finally, as she chose the red satin slippers she had first asked for. At least the green butterflies were still there! The foreign lady had finished too, and was smiling radiantly. The man spoke again:

"She wishes to thank you. She says she will not buy your fruit because she cannot eat it, but she hopes you will be successful and that the new year will be thick with happiness for you." Leaning closer he slipped a wad of paper into the boy's hand.

Nguong Ling made another graceful bow. "I regret there was so little to draw," he mourned. "I fear she has wearied herself in vain."

The two strangers were soon lost in the crowd, taking most of his customers with them. With astonishment, Nguong Ling stared for the first time at his diminished piles of fruit.

"Look at the coppers!" he cried. "Why, I sold a whole week's worth in just those few minutes." His fingers tightened with joy, and he felt the paper in his palm. Bending low against the stand, he opened it to discover a shining silver dollar. He almost knocked the entire stand into the street. *A whole dollar!* Rows and rows of slippers danced invitingly before his eyes, making the shop a blurred vision of flowered brocades. Above them all, on the top shelf, the sky-blue ones with their pale green butterflies and plum blossoms remained untouched.

"I'll just look at them for a while," he thought happily. His joy bubbled over into his song:

"Olives — olives — green and brown,
Dates — dates — polished and round."

More than one person stopped to buy. In another hour the last date was gone, the lights

were dim; but the money pocket under his coat was warm and full. Then, his stool folded over his arm, the empty tray on his head, Nguong Ling sauntered across the street and pointed to the slippers. Actually he held them in his hand!

"Two dollars — five dimes," he counted. "Wrap them well," he urged.

The shopkeeper grinned. "The Spirit of the Street brought you luck this night," he said.

"My sister's spirit," was the startling reply.

Dawn was already beginning to creep along the city wall as Nguong Ling neared his own village. No fear of dark or evil spirits had hindered his long walk home. The distance had not wearied him, no winds had chilled, for under his arm were the wedding slippers, and his heart was thick with happiness.



SIX AND SEVEN

SIX AND SEVEN

The rainy season had begun in earnest; so earnestly, indeed, that the Chinese primary room was just as dreary as though there were no curving dragon-roof to protect it from the drenching downpour. Across the mountains clouds of snow were blowing rain — more rain — toward the city until the valley of happiness itself (for that was exactly the name given it by the early settlers) was fast vanishing under the raw mist. The desks and chairs of the schoolroom stood about awkwardly, made all the more cheap and gaudy because of their red paint. As to the children, they were huddling deeper and deeper into the slight warmth of cotton coats and looked miserable enough.

The Arithmetic Teacher raised her head. "Hei King," she sighed sadly, "what are six and seven?"

"Six and seven," responded Hei King in an equally hopeless voice, "six and seven —" by now she had struggled to her feet, "why six and seven is — are — is twenty-nine."

The Arithmetic Teacher was aghast. One might say she was fairly frozen with horror. Gradually the class entire woke to the immensity of six and seven stretching themselves to twenty-nine.

"But, Hei King," urged the startled teacher; "Hei King, *six*, — just six fingers, you know, and seven —"

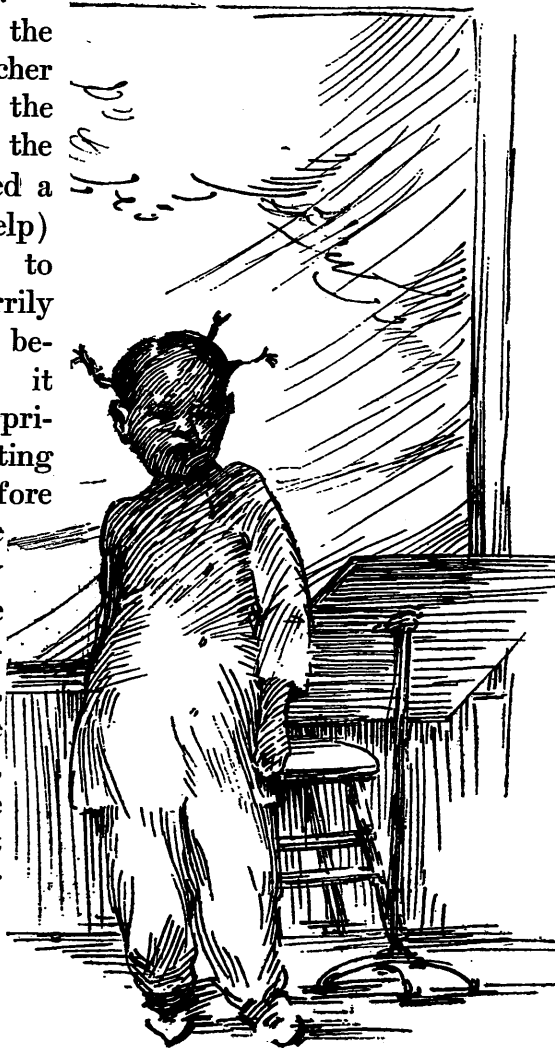
But Hei King, with one agonized glance, had crumpled into a pitiful heap behind her desk and was sobbing quietly. What part of her wasn't crying was shivering with cold. She was so tiny, her two stumpy braids looked so dismal, her legs with their orange stockings were so diminutive, that the Arithmetic Teacher closed her book. Speaking with quite a good bit of warmth for a person in a room where each word produced a puff of white steam, she announced, "After all, we might let six and seven wait until the snow has lifted from the mountains. On such an afternoon it seems to me the fire in my room must be especially lonesome without us. It would," she suggested, "be such fun to warm it, and make ourselves some cambric tea."

When they saw she was in earnest, all the little primarians dropped their arithmetics into the red desks, came several inches out of the shelter of their coats, and stood in line — their eyes dancing. They knew the Arithmetic Teacher, and that when a desire suddenly possessed her, it was almost certain to hold some loved delight.

In a few minutes they were trooping down the gray hall, around the corner, across a stone

threshold, and then they were in so sudden and friendly a warmth that they all heaped themselves in the farthest spot from the fire lest their presence cool it down with fear. Hei King was the farthest of all.

As soon as the Arithmetic Teacher had knelt on the hearth to explain the situation (she used a brass poker to help) the blaze began to burn more merrily than ever. Almost before they knew it themselves, the primaries were sitting in a semi-circle before it, counting the fire fairies as they danced up the chimney and sipping cambric tea, which, since the day was so cold, had more than the regulation amount of sugar. An hour



later it was a much happier, red-cheeked primary class who made their way back to the intricacies of writing Chinese characters.

Hei King, being in the farthest corner, was naturally the last to leave. Just before she reached the door, the Arithmetic Teacher drew her back to the fire, as she said, "Don't you think we might talk a little about it, Hei King?"

For answer the child sighed deeply and worked the toe of her cloth slipper along the design of the hearth bricks. The Arithmetic Teacher stared out at the mountains. But she didn't see them at all. Instead, she was seeing Hei King as she had appeared the first day of the fall term — Hei King, a weak, scrawny child, whose mouth drooped continually in a downward crescent, whose eyes were more yellow than brown, whose hair —! Indeed, if it hadn't been for the hair, the Arithmetic Teacher would probably never have seen Hei King at all. It was neither long nor short, that hair, but just a stumpy stiff bristle which stuck out, all ends, from the back of her neck.

For Hei King had been ill, terribly ill, with such a high fever that it had taken the most expensive spirit charmers with their deepest drums and clangingest cymbals to drive out the devils

who were tormenting her body. But the devils had not been content to go without her spirit; so for a revenge, perhaps, they had taken away most of her hair with them. When she was strong enough to realize anything at all, Hei King learned the horrible news that all her long shining hair was gone. The disgrace was great. In vain did she wear a close-fitting cap; it made her more than ever grotesque. She was the laughing stock of the whole neighborhood. She scarcely dared appear at the door of her father's shop because of the taunting remarks of some passing child. As for going back to the government day school where she had been studying, the thought was unbearable. There would be no peace for her, in the classroom or out; yet going to school had been her greatest joy. It was her mother who finally suggested the mission boarding-school as a temporary solution. There she knew Hei King would be carefully guarded from teasing classmates. When the hair was grown the child could return to the day school. The father was at first skeptical, though at heart he had as much pride as any about his daughter's education. Finally he had gruffly given his consent, though urging her to remember the teachings of her ancestors, and not "to eat the foreign doctrine of Christianity."

So Hei King with her two red trunks and her blue bed mat had arrived at the mission compound, one warm September morning. Such a pathetic picture she had made that the Arithmetic Teacher, who was also the school treasurer and the grammar teacher and the playground leader and endless other things had never quite forgotten her. At first Hei King's answers in class had been as abrupt and queer as her hair; but as the year progressed, and her hair had grown, her mind had gone along with it until now she was near being the very best primarian. No wonder her answer about six and seven had so startled her dearest teacher.

The pattern on the hearth was well traced by the time the Arithmetic Teacher sat down on the firestool.

"Let me see," she mused, "it was twenty-something you said."

"Twenty-nine," volunteered Hei King hopelessly.

"But, *twenty-nine*?"

"That is the day. I — I wasn't thinking about arithmetic." Hei King sounded more remote than ever.

The Arithmetic Teacher's eyes danced. "Neither was I," she whispered. Then, by way of encouragement, she added, "It must be some

special feast day. Do you want permission to go home on the twenty-ninth?"

"I — I suppose so," faltered Hei King, almost getting lost in a huge sigh which followed.

"O-o-o-h," mused the other; "could you tell me?"

Hei King seemed quite willing. "You remember my hair," she began eagerly, "how short it was when I came?"

The teacher nodded.

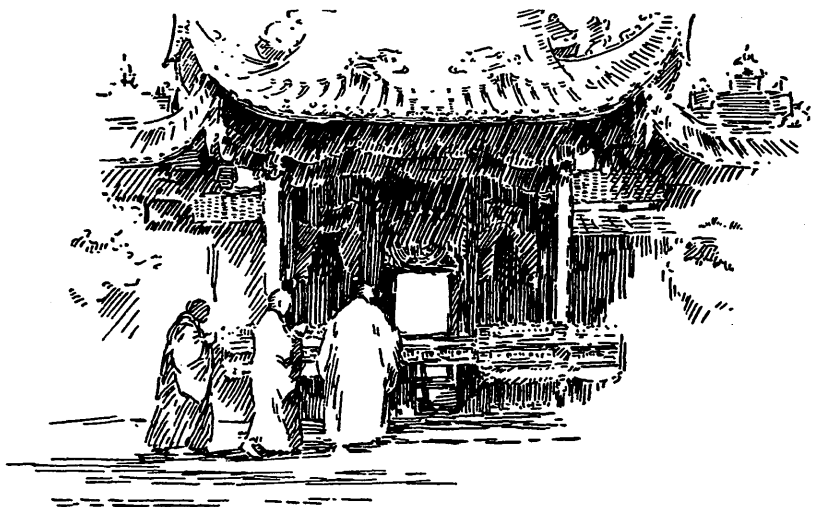
"And you remember my parents told you how much money it cost to cure me when I was so ill?" Her eyes grew wide. "Why, they had a priest come from the most expensive temple. He sang his loudest chants; he burned whole piles of idol paper; he lit the most fragrant incense. It was so costly, just for *me*, even though I am the first born. This month, the idol is to come to our street. There is to be a procession. My father is making great preparations for sacrifices to show the idol his gratitude. And I am to take a stool to bow down before the idol seven times as he passes. It is on the twenty-ninth day." Hei King looked tragic. "But now, since I have come to this school my classmates tell me it would be wrong to do this thing. They say it would make you unhappy, because you have taught us about the God who loves — But there is also

the honor of my family. It cost a great deal to cure me, you see."

The Arithmetic Teacher saw. It was the same problem of a heathen home and a Christian school and one poor lone child bound to both. The snow on the mountains blew stronger; the blaze in the fireplace snapped and smoked. Finally the Arithmetic Teacher, who had been tracing another pattern along the hearth with *her* shoe, remarked, "What would happen, Hei King, if I refused you permission for that day?"

Hei King looked considerably happier for a moment. "Of course," she quavered, "if I told my parents, or if you told them that I could not go, they would respect your wishes; but still they might take me out of school altogether. After all, it was very expensive."

"But if you worked especially hard — oh, es-



pecially so! — and managed to be the highest or near the highest of your class, do you suppose that would please them enough to let you stay in school? Of course, you would have to work hard, hard enough to let your mind grow faster than your hair even.”

Hei King's eyes sparkled. “I could *try*,” she cried. “I could! Then if they came on the match-day —” The match-day, so-called, was the final test day when parents came to listen to oral test questions. The child who did the best work was rewarded with a brilliant red ribbon tied to her coat.

The conspiracy grew. In the week or two which followed, Hei King worked so diligently she had little time to worry about the fatal twenty-ninth. Her parents came and asked to have her come home for that day. The Arithmetic Teacher fed them her sweetest cakes and her hottest tea, the while she praised their daughter's work until, in spite of himself, the father's chest began to expand. Between them they really didn't come to any definite decision about the permission because they were so excited about the match-day. When they left, they promised to return then.

Come they did, an hour early, in order to occupy two coveted front seats. To them the

testing of the arithmetic and grammar and character writing seemed intricate enough. They could scarcely tell whether Hei King was right or wrong in her answers, but they did watch her move steadily toward the top of the line. Finally she had actually gained the first place. The final questions were in arithmetic. Hei King gave each answer slowly and with infinite care. But when the very last one came, her eyes suddenly danced; for the Arithmetic Teacher, quite unconsciously, had asked, "What are sixteen and thirteen?"

And without a quiver, Hei King answered, "Sixteen and thirteen are — twenty-nine."

That night she wore a red ribbon on her coat.



THE SINGING LADY



THE SINGING LADY

"All this business about 'the call of the East,' " groaned the Young Missionary, as her 'ricksha bumped across the bridge of Ten Thousand Ages, "all this business about 'the call of the East' — It's *one* thing at night while the twinkling candles are hiding the dirt and the shopkeepers are playing flutes at their doorsteps and burning incense to the Spirit of the Street. At night you can *hear* the call without seeing it; but on a gray morning when they're bringing loads of fish and slopping water until the stones are slime-covered — It's all *right* when you sail majestically through the streets in a private 'ricksha with a clanging bell and two coolies and cushions, but it's all *wrong* the next morning when you come home in a springless affair of red paint — ruinous to clothes no matter how carefully you sit! Oh, my eye, what a mess!"

The Young Misisonary was on her way back to the girls' school compound to teach her morning classes. The night before being Wednesday, she had as usual gone across the city to the big mission compound to attend the weekly tea and prayer meeting. Always when she started forth at night through the narrow streets, her day's work done, she gave full swing to her imagina-

tion, letting the Spirit of the Streets weave its inevitable spell of romance about her. There were, of course, the mornings after — seven of them every week for most of the year. At night, whether she went across the city or out for a short walk, that spell of the East surrounded her. Always the next morning she had to fight to hold it — fight through hours of teaching to flattening voices, half-tones and whole tones and sharps and flats and scales — when she would be teaching songs. Not that she didn't love her demure dark-eyed scalesters; but, just the same, it was a struggle to connect her nights with her days. She was, you must remember, very young.

Besides, this was a gray day. The one thing that wasn't was a black and white and red dancing figure at the top of the steps where the 'ricksha stopped.

"The day's greeting, the day's greeting, O Singing Lady, Singing Lady," she called. "I've been watching for you to come back. I saw you last night but little brother had fallen asleep in my arms, and I dared not call."

"Good morning, Ai Hua," returned the Young Missionary. "I looked for you too, last night, but I decided you were in bed. How is Guok Hua? Can you leave him long enough to walk down the steps with me?"

Meeting little Ai Hua had been another charm of her evening walks, ever since the child had ventured near one night, her small brother in her arms. The Young Missionary had paused to pinch his cheek — and from that time friendship had steadily grown. Once Ai Hua had asked what the Young Missionary carried in her black leather case.

“Songs to sing,” had been the answer.

“Oh, then,” Ai Hua had cried in amazement, “are you a sing-song girl?” — the vision of sing-song girls expanding in her mind to include this foreign person.

“Well, not exactly,” laughed the Young Missionary, “not a sing-song girl, — just a Singing Lady at night, and a teacher by day. When you learn scales and sharps and flats you know, instead of only songs, then you aren’t a sing-song girl, — you’re just a Singing Lady.”

“Oh, why, *me*,” cried the other raptly, “then if *I* could learn the scales, perhaps I could sing without being a sing-song girl, couldn’t I?”

“You could that,” answered the Singing Lady, “and maybe some day you will.”



This morning as they walked on down the steps, Ai Hua wished to know all about the night before, and the day before, and what the girls were singing at the school and how one kept one's small brother from crying when the rest of the family were asleep. By the time she had walked as far as was permitted, the Young Missionary looked down at her and laughed.

"Oh, Ai Hua," she said, "you are certainly pure silver."

"I?" puzzled the child; "alas, I am very poor." Yet because the Singing Lady laughed she did likewise, until her eyes were crescent slits and her mouth a diminutive half moon.

All that term they met and walked together down the dragon steps, discussing the ways and means of teaching Ai Hua her scales, and Guok Hua not to cry. Yet the end found them no nearer a solution of their problems. Then a whole week passed with no sight of Ai Hua. The Young Missionary paid little heed at first, until another and then another day went by. She had begun to worry, one morning, when a small cousin of Ai Hua's greeted her at the steps.

"Ai Hua begs you to stop to see her."

"Is she ill, then?" questioned the Young Missionary — her voice no longer sounded like a song.

"Would that she were," returned the other. "Far worse — it is her little brother. Her father says she has not cared for him well enough, and the spirits are angry. After all, of what use is a girl?"

"Will you take me to her?"

She followed the cousin through the brass-shop. Men were pounding metal at the forge. Small boys, with hammer and a single nail were making designs of pagodas and flowers on vases. Then past a dingy court where two bamboo trees grew in one corner and a mother pig was grunting in the mud, beyond the main hall of the house with its ancestral tablets and stone floors, into a side bedroom. What light there was came from an open door leading into a second rear room. Piled high against the wall were four red leather trunks with dragons crawling over their sides. For the rest, save the bed and stool the room was quite bare.

Ai Hua, crouched on the floor, was teetering back and forth on her heels as she stroked a muffled lump of clothing on the bed. Even at the sight of the Singing Lady, she did not smile. Her face was expressionless; only her eyes were so heavy the Young Missionary could see nothing else.

"Alas," said Ai Hua, weakly, "my brother is

ill. All the week he has grown steadily worse. At first he was just fretful. I thought it might be fever, but now, see — the spots are appearing. The lumps beneath them are hard.”

For a moment, the other felt her heart congeal. If the boy had smallpox, it was finished! She leaned over gingerly to test the puny flesh, not noticing the father’s scuffling approach.

“Sorrow has entered my house,” he mourned. “My one son, who would carry on my trade, is stricken. Would that Ai Hua had been more diligent.”

The child bent her head submissively, but the Young Missionary’s was held high. The Doctor’s recent report flashed across her mind; “epidemic of chicken pox is causing a panic; — *hard* chicken pox, *light* smallpox resemble each other in appearance —.”



In halting Chinese, then, the Young Missionary begged the old father to send Guok Hua into the foreign hospital. She used excellent reasons — the care, the cheapness, a cousin who had been cured. In her singing-est voice she pleaded, so earnestly that

her sincerity won. But because she had lived in China long enough to learn a few of its wondrous ways, the Young Missionary decided that here, if ever, was a chance to talk price. After much arguing she persuaded the father to agree that if the son lived, the daughter should be allowed to attend the mission school the next term.

By the time the bargain was struck, Ai Hua's eyes were no longer heavy with fear, but they were even bigger than before. She collected Guok Hua's clothing; she dressed him warmly; but her mind was in such a haze that she almost put on the trousers wrong way to. What made her heart dance so? Was it because her fear was lifted — or because her one wish might, *might* some day come true? Trudging along the street later, carrying the knotted bundle of clothes, the dream continued. Even the sight of the great hospital with its gleaming floors and smooth chairs didn't bring her back to reality.

The Young Missionary stayed right with her while Guok Hua was carried off in the arms of a dark-haired nurse. The father went home. Ai Hua submitted graciously while the foreign doctor tapped her here and poked her there — laughing all the while and telling such funny stories that Ai Hua was amused instead of frightened.

Ai Hua remained at the hospital even after

that was over. She supposed it was to care for her brother that she stayed. Soon, to her amazement, she discovered that what was expected of her was to eat three bowls of rice a day, stay out in the sunshine of the hospital court, and amuse *herself* in whatever way she pleased. Never before had she had so much space and time to use freely! She even slept in a room all by herself. A room? Indeed, it was more like a whole house; for it boasted two windows — with *glass*. So much sunshine came in that Ai Hua took baths in it every morning!

Often the Singing Lady came to see her. One day, the dark-haired nurse came too. They were both laughing so gayly that Ai Hua's eyes danced as of old.

"Should you like to see your brother, now?" Without waiting for a reply, the nurse caught Ai Hua's hand, leading her down the corridor where she had disappeared that first fateful day. They stopped at a heavy door which swung open noiselessly. Inside Ai Hua stood blinking.

The room was so whitely clean! Mercy! the bed pads weren't dark blue — they were white. So were the walls. Even small brother, propped against pillows, wore a clean white coat. He was too intent with a picture book to notice his sister until she spoke.

"Why, Guok Hua!" she exclaimed, "why, Guok Hua, — look how you've faded!"

"Come see these pictures," was the unconcerned reply; "I shall draw better ones, myself, some day."

Ai Hua's astonishment increased.

"Dear me," she murmured, "I didn't know you learned things in a hospital."

"Don't be too concerned, yet," explained the nurse. "Guok Hua has just decided to ask your father to send him to school so he can learn to draw."

"Just as I am going, to learn to sing? Oh, my father *will* send me, won't he?" but her eyes showed their fear.

"You'd just better believe he will," remarked the Singing Lady aside, to the nurse, "if I have to resort to heathen methods to make him."

Oddly enough, there was no necessity for that. Two days later, when Guok Hua was restored to the parental roof, healed in body and revived in disposition, the old man's joy was complete. He signed his character-name to the school application, with no argument whatever.

Three weeks later, Ai Hua entered the green gate opposite the brass-shop. For a week or more, the Young Missionary was too busy with schedules to see much of the child — especially as she

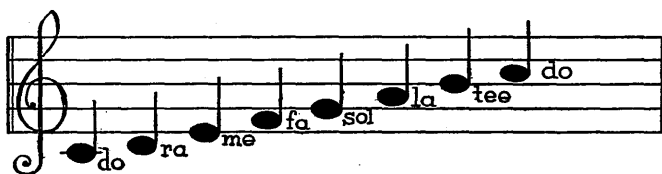
was in the lower primary building. One morning, however, as the Singing Lady was closing the piano and folding music charts, Ai Hua came quietly to stand beside her. When the teacher turned Ai Hua said, "I've learned it now, you know; so pretty soon, I'll be one, maybe."

"One what?" smiled the Young Missionary.

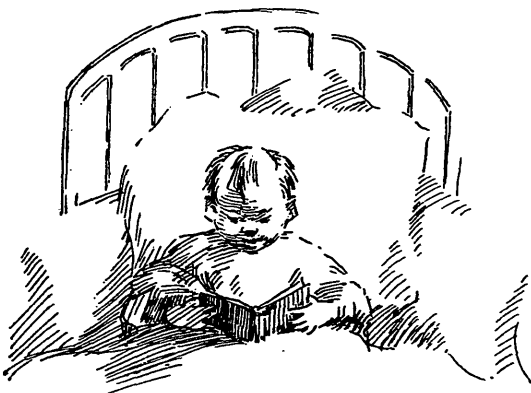
"Why, you remember — what you said I'd be if I learned it. I could show you."

"I wish you would," was the encouraging reply.

Shyly, for a moment, Ai Hua traced the line of board with a cloth slipper. Then she clasped her hands tightly — looking straight into her teacher's eyes while she sang



With each note her soul seemed to grow sweet and full.



It dawned on the Young Missionary then, that thus had little Ai Hua begun her career as a Singing Lady.

THE IDOL PROCESSION

THE IDOL PROCESSION

Leng Nguk wiped the rice from her small brother's face as she pushed him ahead of her to the front step of her father's shop.

"Sit here for a bit, Daik Gwong," she urged, "and don't go running out on the streets. Remember how a 'ricksha nearly hit you the last time."

Without waiting for a reply, Leng Nguk hurried back to the rear court of the house.

Usually it would worry her to leave the boy so far from her reach, but this was such a special day that she scarcely gave a thought to the matter.

Anyway, her old grandfather was smoking his pipe close by, and he would watch the son of the house —



that is, he would if he didn't fall asleep. It being a holiday, 'too, all the small boys of the neighborhood were squatting on the road, gambling their *cash*, so there would surely be a group near enough Daik Gwong to amuse him. Anyway Leng Nguk *had* to wash the family coats. It was the day of the great idol procession. That night when candles were lit in the darkened street, balls of incense would be hung from every doorway — balls as large as lotus blossoms — and their fragrance would fill the air until the heat of the summer night would be quite forgotten. Lanterns, gayly painted in reds and greens, would be swinging everywhere. It would all be very gay. When everything was ready, down the street would come the idol procession. There would be the heralds, festive in heavily embroidered coats, blowing their brass horns or clanging their cymbals. Then would come a group of small boys, waving banners and throwing lighted chains of firecrackers before them. Last, swaying from side to side, or lurching forward in a way that almost stopped your heart from beating, would come the two idols, the Tall Brother and the Little Brother.

The Tall Brother always wore white satin, which floated out in a train behind him. He towered high above the shops. In fact, so im-

mense was he that the man who manipulated him from within only came to the waist of the creature. It was a fearful and awe-inspiring idol, the Tall Brother. One did not approach too near. But the Little Brother was so hideous that Leng Nguk often had not the courage to keep her face uncovered as he went by. He was short and square and ugly, with a head twice as large as the rest of him, and a black tongue which wagged about in a most terrifying manner. To be sure, she could always see the legs of the man inside the idol making it move, but just the same she could not forget that the Little Brother was a spirit — one to be revered and avoided, especially if one were unfortunate enough to be a small girl.

Nevertheless, because, except for weddings or funerals, it was the most exciting event of her life, and because she loved the noise and rhythm of the horns, Leng Nguk always looked forward to the day of the idol procession. To be sure, she seldom saw it save through a crack in the wall, since it came so late and there were so many duties to perform for the evening feast, as well as the numberless small cousins and brothers to watch. Oh, yes, there was plenty of excitement on such days!

So this morning Leng Nguk was busy. Occa-

sionally, as she scrubbed a coat with a stiff brush, she would pause to listen. The sound of children's voices came to her faintly. Now and then she heard Daik Gwong's name, so she knew he was perfectly safe. It was nearly two hours later that she wiped her hands on her red trousers and started out toward the front of the house. The old grandfather, as usual, had fallen asleep over his pipe, his head thrown forward, his mouth open. The street was strangely silent. No groups of youthful gamblers were matching their *cash*; the dogs even, drowsing in the sun, were too hot to bark.

Leng Nguk's heart just about turned over. For nowhere — under the counter of the shop, in the road, or in the neighbors' houses — did she see Daik Gwong. Her eyes widened with horror. Of all days to have something happen to him! The idols might already be on the street where they could easily snatch him away! Oh, it was terrible beyond thought! He was her brother; he was her charge; he was the son of his father's house!

Leng Nguk ran madly down the road, turning to almost every one she met to ask if they had seen a small boy whose head, except for a tuft to start his queue, was shaved; whose feet were

bare save for the silver rings around his ankles; whose trousers were blue, whose coat was red, who had a silver ring about his neck and two in his ears to fool the evil spirits into thinking he was a girl. In spite of her confused description, more than one passer-by would recall seeing the boy and point onward down the street, Chinese fashion, with an upward jerk of the chin.

She ran on thus, until she had reached the gate of the foreign compound. If she had been frightened before, she was fairly frantic with horror now. Should the foreign devils have taken her darling Daik Gwong, the very worst had happened. She had seen small children go in at that gate, but she had never seen them come out, though she had watched for an hour at least. Besides she had heard her father tell about a friend of theirs who had been behind that compound wall for ten years. If they had her brother —! One thing, she decided: she would *never* return home without him. She would go in there, she would beg on her knees, with her three deepest bows, she would — why, she would sell herself to them if necessary, as long as they would return the son of her father's house. Leng Nguk did not cry. She just stood there before the high gate, her hands clutching her trousers, her face

smearred with perspiration and dirt, her eyes big and black.

At that precise moment the old gateman shuffled out to the street to empty a bucket of water. Seeing the waiting child, he said, "The time is not yet come for some up, if you have one."

"O h, o h!"
they then
tle brother?"

"C a u g h t
he? Who is

"Why, the
I left him at
house, but the
father went to
Gwong ran off.



she cried, "have
caught my lit-

him? Who is
catching him?"
foreign devils!
the front of our
ancient grand-
sleep and Daik
I know he

must be here, for all along the way people have told me to follow this direction. He had a silver ring around his neck, his head was shaved, and his coat was clean and red. Oh, please, please let me see him!"

The old gateman looked down at the trembling child.

"Who has been telling you tales?" he asked. "The foreigners aren't devils; at least, the ones within this gate are not. They are teachers, and

this is a school where children come to play and learn. Perhaps your brother is inside. It is the opening day and so many new children came to the kindergarten, he may have slipped in with the rest. You need have no fear. He will be quite safe. Come in, if you wish, and see."

Taking the child by the hand, he led her in through the gate, past a row of poinsettia bushes, grown taller even than the high wall, up some stone steps, beyond a white house, bigger and with more windows than Leng Nguk had ever dreamed *could* be, around finally to a red brick building. He left her on the porch while he went inside to inquire. Leng Nguk stared about in complete astonishment. It was actually cool in here; there were flowers along the walk; birds were singing in the trees. This didn't look like a place of devils, she thought.

She was growing cool and refreshed when suddenly sounds issued from the building that made her forget the gateman's order that she wait his return. Drawn irresistibly by clapping hands and singing voices, she opened the screen door and stepped inside. At first the great size of the room, the smoothness of the floors and the light coming in from the window left her blinking. But in a moment or two she cried out in

amazement, "Why, it's an idol procession, only everybody is an idol and they aren't wearing masks."

She had come into the kindergarten room just as all the children were marching around in the circle singing, "I want to be a soldier, a soldier, a soldier." To Leng Nguk, who had never seen any kind of procession except those for idols, this could have no other name.

Before the foreign teacher, listening to the gateman's story, could reach her, Leng Nguk had discovered her brother strutting around the circle, clapping his fat hands together as vigorously as the rest. She darted over to catch him, but instead of welcoming his rescuer, Daik Gwong let out a wail of anger at the sight of his sister.

"Oh, dear," he moaned, "she'll take me home and make me sit on the step to watch silly boys gamble their *cash*." Then turning toward her he stamped his foot as he shouted, "I don't want to go home! I don't want to go home!"

Leng Nguk's eyes were horror-filled; her mouth hung wide.

"Why, Daik Gwong," she quavered, "have they made you into an idol already?"

"An idol?" he shrieked. "No, no, stupid one. This is just a play. The teacher has explained it

to us. We are all learning to be soldiers of a King, only we don't fight with swords; we wave banners. That is, we shall have the banners to wave as soon as we have learned to march with our feet all going together."

By this time the teacher had interrupted the family conference. After silencing the boy, she listened to the little sister, who pleaded that her brother be returned to his father's house, even if she had to sell her worthless self in return. At this part of her story, the kindergartner, who was young and almost as new inside the compound wall as Leng Nguk herself, threw back her head, laughing so delightedly that Leng Nguk added, "To be sure, I didn't know it could be like this inside the wall. Perhaps I shouldn't mind staying here a long time."

With much explaining, however, the teacher informed her it was not at all necessary for her to sell herself or anything else in order to take her brother home. She said, moreover, they were free to return at any time; that this was a day kindergarten where all the children of the neighborhood were invited to come to play games and sing songs. With some difficulty she convinced Leng Nguk that this particular kind of play was not an idol procession, that there was no Tall

Brother or Little Brother, but that every one, great or small, could clap her hands and march around the circle if she wished to.

Slowly it dawned upon Leng Nguk that here was a place full of flowers and trees and cool air, where Daik Gwong could be safe and happy — nay, more, where she herself could come; that here she could sit in a shiny chair, short enough so that her feet touched the floor; that she could play games with the rest; and the morning over, she was at perfect liberty to return home. It was unbelievable. All the way home, a little later, clasping the hot hand of the still rebellious Daik Gwong, she marveled over the idea.

That night when her father had satisfied himself at a feast of shark fins, and duck, and meat balls rolled in cabbage, and delicacies of jelly-fish, Leng Nguk broached the subject of taking her small brother to the foreign compound for the regular morning play. Her father eyed her for some minutes before, grudgingly, he gave his consent. If she could return home in time to cook the noon rice, she might go to the house of the foreign devils; but never was she to leave her brother there alone. This she promised eagerly, and skipped out to the back court to tell Daik Gwong the glad news.

Two hours later, when the clang of cymbals, the noise of firecrackers and the shrill tone of trumpets warned people of the idol's approach, Leng Nguk was fast asleep, dreaming of another procession where every one could march and carry banners — even girls.



THE MATCH MONEY

THE MATCH MONEY

Dung Seng looked up drearily from his weaving. His greatest effort to do exactly what the Kindergarten Teacher had told him was wrong again! She had said to use brown worsted to outline the picture of the buffalo cow — and he had used *pink*! Who ever heard of a pink buffalo cow? And the Kindergarten Teacher was so sweet; she would look at him with such a hurt expression that as usual Dung Seng knew he could never explain to her. The thread had *seemed* brown when he started —. He had been so careful this time to wash the stain of red paint from his fingers. Yesterday he had forgotten, and the corners of his sewing card had been smutched with red. It had been squirming work to avoid telling his beloved teacher the cause of that red paint. Now there would be more questions to answer. Disconsolately, Dung Seng peered at the work of his next door neighbor. Just as he had expected! Hing Ting's design was spotlessly clean. Her stitches were carefully worked. Beside his skewgee cow, her yellow cat looked smug and superior. He could have wept with mortification. After all, what was the use? What was the *use* of even trying to come to school if his best efforts were always going to be

such wretched failures? More and more dejected, he sank lower and lower into his tiny red chair, despair printed broadly on his small dark face.

From her corner of the room, the Kindergarten Teacher had been watching. Not only this day but for nearly two months now, she had scarcely taken her mind from the puzzling subject of Dung Seng. Not that he ever did anything really mischievous. No, indeed; the Kindergarten Teacher often said she loved mischievous children best. Sometimes to save her soul she couldn't help laughing (even though she did try to conceal her amusement in her handkerchief) when something particularly funny happened. There was the morning, for instance, when Dui Ding tried to fasten Mi Song's braid to a chair, — and she tied his queue instead! Oh, yes, indeed, mischief was one thing, but this apparently sullen manner of Dung Seng's was quite another. Nearly every morning he was late to school. Try as she would, the Kindergarten Teacher could not seem to hurry him. When he did arrive his fingers as well as his face were usually blotched with red paint. His hair was never combed. He dragged himself into his place in the circle as though it were bedtime instead of morning. In all the games he was the slowest. In all the songs his voice was the most tuneless.

Still the Kindergarten Teacher was convinced there must be some one thing that Dung Seng could do — faithfully, if not brilliantly. Else, she argued, why had he been called “Dung Seng — the faithful one”? Finally a week ago she had discovered that he was unusually quick in the use of his hands. When she had changed him to the handwork table, that first Monday morning, a brisk sunshiny day of early spring, his eyes had lightened with new joy and the corners of his mouth had ceased to droop. But the very next day he had ruined his card with red paint. And now, after all her careful explaining, he was making a pink cow!

The Kindergarten Teacher approached the side of the handwork table.

“Is the farmyard ready?” she asked.

Hing Ting rose proudly. Half skipping, half running to her teacher’s side, she exclaimed, “See my lovely yellow cat. It is a royal color.”

“So it is,” responded the other gayly. “What shall you call it?”

“As for that,” reflected Hing Ting, “as for that — since it is yellow, I shall call it ‘the most honorable and highly respected one.’” She ran back to her own place. As she passed Dung Seng, she paused disdainfully.

“Dung Seng has sewn his buffalo cow *pink*,”

she shrilled. "I should not like to drink the milk of a pink buffalo cow. I don't think he can put his animal in our clean dairy, do you?"

Dung Seng made no protest, but at her first mention of his poor disgraced animal, he had turned the creature face downward on the desk. He raised dull eyes to the teacher.

"I cannot even color a cow. My hopes are broken," he said.

As she looked at him, suddenly the worry and wonder of the Kindergarten Teacher ceased; no longer was she perplexed as to the cause of Dung Seng's stupidity — for one full glance at those heavy eyes had told her. The Kindergarten Teacher knew what was wrong, now! Swiftly she rounded the table and held Dung Seng close in her arms.

"Tell me, little Faithful One," she whispered, "what time did you go to bed last night?"

She felt the boy's heart give a mighty jump, but no reply came.

"For a long while, I have wanted to come to your home, Dung Seng, to visit all your small brothers and sisters. But I have waited, thinking perhaps your mother might come to see you here, and I could find from her a convenient time to call. Do you suppose I could come this afternoon?"

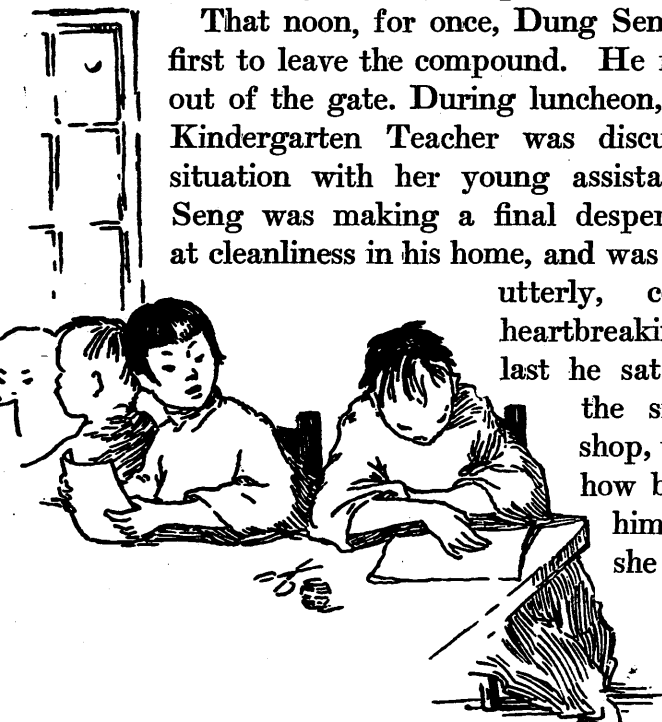
For a moment Dung Seng was paralyzed with agony. His lovely kindergarten teacher, so spotless and so shining — and sort of fragrant, like a flower — coming into the hovel that was his home — seeing the dinginess of it — the filth in the corners — his father's hands — all the other little uncombed heads? Oh, never, never!

"You — you have no leisure to come so long a way," he stammered, his brain refusing to invent a logical excuse.

The Kindergarten Teacher only laughed. "Don't you worry about my leisure," she said, "I am coming to see your pink cows."

That noon, for once, Dung Seng was the first to leave the compound. He fairly tore out of the gate. During luncheon, while the Kindergarten Teacher was discussing the situation with her young assistant, Dung Seng was making a final desperate effort at cleanliness in his home, and was failing —

utterly, completely, heartbreakingly. At last he sat down on the sill of the shop, wondering how best to kill himself before she should



come and discover his awful secret. On a high stool behind him his father cursed him for his laziness while his mother in angry tones urged him to look after his smallest brother. But he did not heed.

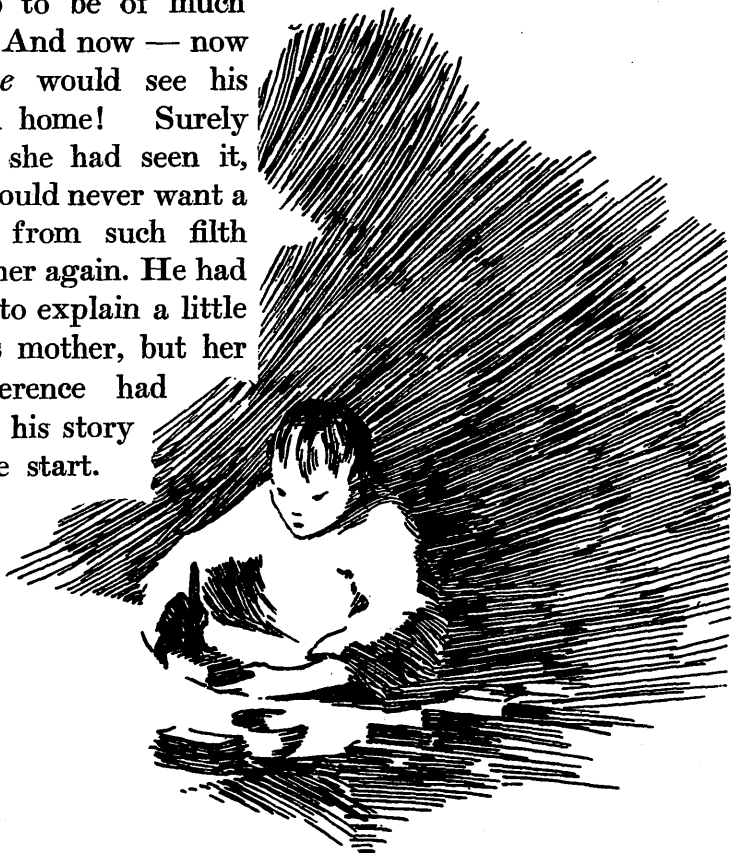
"So this is the knowledge they teach you at your school of foreign devils?" grumbled his father. "You have gone there long enough. When first you asked to go, two coppers a day were sufficient, but soon it will be three and then four. We shall be eaten out of rice by you — you and your sullen learning!" "Ya," added his mother. "What good is the work you do at night? It takes you so long to earn two coppers' worth that you burn all the oil there is in the house before you finish." And so on and on.

Dung Seng thought back over the whole hopeless matter. It had begun early one gorgeous fall morning when Daik Gwong, a small friend of his, had told him of the mission kindergarten where one could go for the whole morning without paying a thing, to sing songs and play games. Daik Gwong had even taken Dung Seng with him once and had shown him the playgrounds with their swings and climbing ropes and balls and sandpiles and laughing children. Dung Seng was determined to go, too. At first his father

wouldn't listen to any conditions whatsoever. His father, who bent his back all day over sulphur tipping for matches, his mother, toiling endlessly over the small wooden boxes to hold the matches, had scoffed at the idea. *She* would teach him all he needed to know. If he grew to be a good match maker what more could he wish? But Dung Seng did wish more. Faithful in this idea as in everything else he did, he persisted diligently until at last they had struck a family bargain. Paper labels had to be pasted on to the boxes. The children usually helped at this. If he could find time to paste two hundred paper labels on the boxes — two hundred each day, that is — which would amount to two coppers' worth, and just about pay for his share of rice, his parents would allow him to attend the kindergarten.

It had sounded easy enough, — but pasting two hundred labels on as many match boxes even for the immense profit of two coppers had been more difficult than he had dreamed. It had meant that every night he must sit bent near a tiny oil lamp, pasting, pasting, pasting, long after the rest of the family were asleep and only howling dogs awake. In the winter weather his hands had been so numb that the work was frightfully slow. When spring came the river dampness kept

the paste wet. But he could have endured that, that and the ever-increasing taunts of his parents. What he could not stand was his failure in school. In spite of his efforts, he never could wake up early enough in the morning. He never had time for more than half a bowl of rice as it was. As for washing his face or combing his hair or getting that stain from his fingers — why, it was impossible. Then when he did arrive at school he was usually too sleepy and numb to be of much use. And now — now — *she* would see his awful home! Surely after she had seen it, she would never want a child from such filth near her again. He had tried to explain a little to his mother, but her indifference had killed his story at the start.



Thus it was a dejected heap of misery that the Kindergarten Teacher with all her gentle politeness found on the doorstep of that hovel where at least five people lived. Dung Seng's agony was supreme. Gladly would he have died on the spot. Curiously enough, though, he soon saw that the Kindergarten Teacher was just as darling, her voice was just as understanding now as it had been over the subject of his pink cow. She didn't seem at all conscious of his parents' hostility. She discussed matches with them, even attempting to fashion a flimsy wooden box herself, and then laughed so contagiously at the awkward result that his father's grim face almost relaxed into a smile. Occasionally she asked a question. Only Dung Seng, who had spent most of the last few months watching her face, had any idea of what was going on in her mind. He remembered seeing that same expression on her face when Leng Ing had purposely knocked down one of the smaller school children. Gradually she began to tell them a few things about the school: how hard it was to keep it clean; how she did wish she could find a boy who would sweep the kindergarten room every morning — some one who would really be faithful, she added. Looking very earnestly at Dung Seng's father (Dung Seng himself was afraid she was going

to cry, she was so upset about that floor), why, she said, she would gladly pay a boy as much as four coppers a day if she could find some one who would be there at seven in the morning and really sweep that room! She went on to explain that the sunlight was so bright, every speck of dirt showed. Four coppers — didn't that seem a fair price she questioned?

Dung Seng had his mouth open all ready to answer that it was far too much to give just for sweeping that shining place, but his mother was already speaking.

"Would it be possible for the boy's parents to have the four coppers?" Her eyes narrowed as she spoke.

The Kindergarten Teacher appeared to hesitate. "There is, of course," she suggested, "the matter of the boy's rice."

"Two coppers is ample rice money," the father remarked.

For quite a few minutes no one spoke. Every one was still sitting there, thinking, when the Kindergarten Teacher rose to go. Dung Seng watched her sadly. It was the last time he should ever see her. For never, never, *never* would he have the face to enter that spotless schoolroom,

now that she had seen the filth of his own home. Besides, a person who makes a pink cow doesn't deserve to make any at all!

She was stepping over the threshold when his father called out:

"Dung Seng is faithful enough. Would you pay us the two coppers and let him live there with you at the school? He could sweep the room well enough and you would have the other two coppers for his rice. He is a nuisance here, burning the oil so late and setting every dog on the street to howling when the rest of us are weary for sleep. But we should have to have two coppers ourselves."

The Kindergarten Teacher turned and looked down at the drooping boy. She came back and took his hand gently in one of hers; in the other she held out a shining double dime piece to the father.

"At least," she said, trying to keep her voice steady (she leaned so close to Dung Seng that he could feel her heart jumping this time), "at least we could try it for a week or so." She placed the silver in the father's hand, and with Dung Seng at her side she started away. At the gate she paused once more.

"You did well," she smiled, "to call your son

‘the faithful one.’ He will keep our oil burning brightly now.”

But the father did not answer nor would he have understood. He saw only the light of the money piece in his hand.



BIG FEET

BIG FEET

The train which had been whirling and puffing through tunnels, and nearly touching the tops of mountains came to a sudden stop — so sudden, indeed, that little Hei Ting almost fell over backward taking her precious burden with her. That would be sad, for her father would be so angry there was no telling what he might do. Still Hei Ting's arms were cramped — her mind was so weary of the circles it kept turning that she was beginning not to care what did happen. It seemed as though she must have been riding forever. She looked around her in disgust — at her dirty clothes which had been clean when she started. The knot which tied her blue apron had become unfastened; one of the pockets was torn off. She had been quite pleased because her enamel earrings, her socks and her apron were all the same color. Now it was difficult even to distinguish the difference between the shades of her yellow trousers or her arms or her hair or her feet. The only thing bright enough to withstand the awful soot of the baggage car was the cerise cord which bound her braid.

And Di Di, her darling little brother whom she had been holding so carefully, was a sight. Because of the heat, he wore only one short coat.

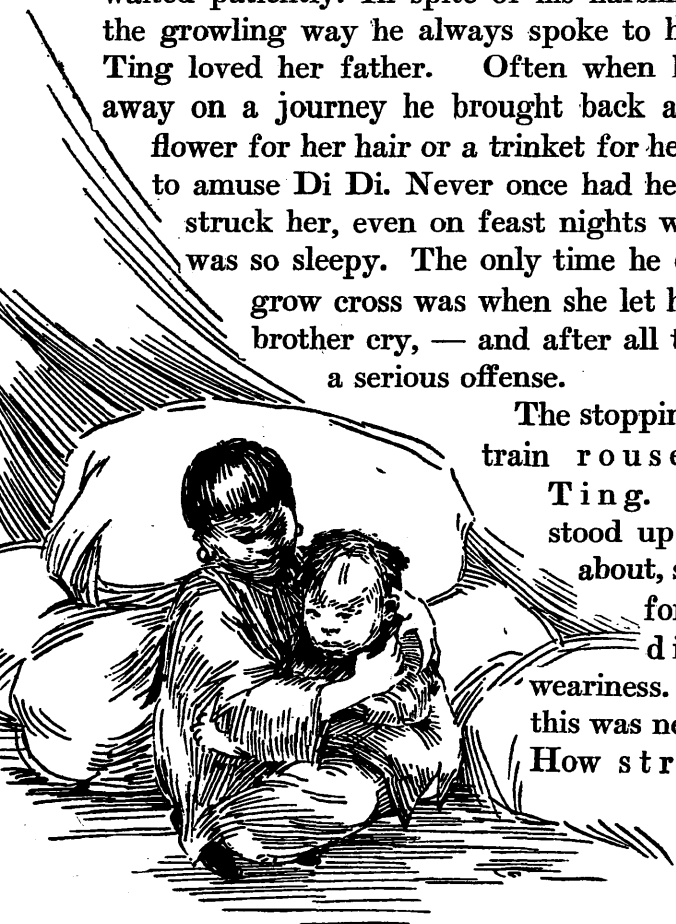
The rest of him was as black as his hair. He had been fretful, too, all day in spite of her efforts to amuse him. He cried when they went through the tunnels; he refused to sleep; nothing satisfied him except to have his sister hold him, rocking back and forth on her heels. All day, all night, part of the next day Hei Ting had been doing just that. Her father and mother had ignored her save to rouse her when she dozed off to sleep and the baby cried. At home, perhaps, her mother might have shared the care of him, but here it was all she could do to keep her own balance. Her bound feet, not much larger than a baby's, were like clumps of wood, utterly helpless against the swift jerks of the train.

Whenever Hei Ting looked at those feet, she shuddered. This was the last year her own would be allowed to grow freely. Her parents had not mentioned it to her, of course, but one night she had heard her father say that as soon as Di Di was able to walk alone, Hei Ting must start the process of binding. She would give anything, do anything to avoid such agony. She knew — because she could remember how awful it had been when a neighbor child had been bound. Besides, Hei Ting had tied her own toe once just over night to see how it would feel. She had been lame for two days afterward. The more

she thought, the sadder she grew. All the happiness which had started with her on the trip deserted her now.

Happy she had been because they were leaving the filth and suffocating air of the coal district. Her father said he was seeking new work; that there would be a surprise for Hei Ting if she waited patiently. In spite of his harshness and the growling way he always spoke to her, Hei Ting loved her father. Often when he went away on a journey he brought back a purple flower for her hair or a trinket for her to use to amuse Di Di. Never once had her father struck her, even on feast nights when she was so sleepy. The only time he ever did grow cross was when she let her little brother cry, — and after all that *was* a serious offense.

The stopping of the train roused Hei Ting. As she stood up to look about, she quite forgot her dirt and weariness. Why, this was new land! How strange!



Nowhere was there coal dust. But there were trees, taller, — why, *way* taller than the train. And clean water, lots of it. It wouldn't take all day to wash clothes in those pools or break one's back, either! Yes, sir, over under the shadiest willow she could see some girls washing. How gay and happy they were; how white were the piles of coats drying on the stones!

"Oh, dear me, oh, *my!*" cried Hei Ting to her mother; "look how clean everything is. Even our blackest rags could be cleansed here."

"Hush now awhile," called back her mother without turning her head; "remember the boy is sleeping. There will be time enough later for washing clothes." Hei Ting danced back and forth on her toes still eager to see the glories all around her.

"But what do they call this kind of land?" she persisted.

"Why, this is country, of course," answered her mother. "It is where the farmers feed their sheep and grow their corn. Wait, I tell you, and see."

Just then a fruit vender came by, singing his wares. Hei Ting opened her eyes in wider astonishment. No wonder the farmers grew things here! There was a peach as big as a ball — like three peaches almost, compared with the

egg-sized fruit she had known. And her father was buying three for one copper apiece. *Three!* That meant she would have three stones to suck. Oh, she might even have a bit of the fruit, herself.

Her father came over to one of the four bundles which were their entire belongings and started to tuck the peaches in the top. Hei Ting was too wise to ask, but her eyes were fairly popping from her head in their surprise.

"Here then, little good-for-nothing," said her father, "take a peach for yourself and see if it will make you less lazy in the future."

"O my father, I am unworthy to receive so much," the child answered. But even then the peach was in her lap, laughing up at her and begging to be eaten. So great was her joy that she forgot all about the streams for washing clothes and the tall trees. She took one mammoth bite. Never, never had she had a whole peach before. She would make this one last forever, she decided, and she would always remember the cool taste of it when her feet were bound and she in agony. It would help her to keep her tears silent as she was expected to do. She sat there eating while the train started again. In fact she was so slow that it was stopping another time just as she had swallowed the last bit.

Her father was suddenly excited. "Quickly, quickly move, oh lazy one," he called, "we have



reached our journey's end." Before she could think scarcely, her mother had snatched the baby from her arms, and Hei Ting was helping her father drag the four precious baskets to the opening of the car. Then with one shove he had rolled them off to the ground. Hei Ting was so anxious lest he bump the peaches that she picked up that bundle and slung it across her shoulder. It was so heavy she had to bend over double. She could only hear the train move out of sight — she could see little else than the ground beneath her feet.

"Move on then, child," she heard her father say, "and follow my feet." She felt the pressure of her mother's hand as she leaned against the child's shoulder, and together they hobbled out across the fields. Things were becoming more and more like a dream. Hei Ting decided that nothing could surprise her now. Her father pulled the load from her back, bidding her look around.

"Oh, what a lovely garden," she cried and was puzzled at her father's mighty laugh.

"Garden, oh stupid one! This is the country. Here we will live. Yonder is the stream where you shall wash the clothes, and we shall test their cleanness. Did I not tell you there would be a surprise?"

Inside the mud hut her mother was already unpacking the baskets. Di Di was sleeping quietly under a huge banyan tree which made shade enough for a whole village, Hei Ting thought, as she watched it. She could hear the birds singing somewhere. After all, if her feet must be bound it was better far that it should be done where there was cooling water and the shade of such glorious trees. She could be happy here, just looking. She was still thinking about it all when her father came out to stand near her.

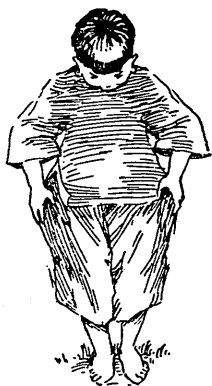
"You like the country then? Well, we shall see how it goes with the lazy one when the sun is hot and there is rice to be planted or potatoes to hoe. No longer shall you sit in the house caring for your brother. It is time you were working now to make some use of yourself. Like a boy you shall be, and work in the fields with your father."

"But my feet —" faltered Hei Ting.

"Your feet, my silly one, shall grow larger and uglier — as a man's, indeed, or a foreign woman's. Lazy though you are I must teach you to work in the fields."

After he had left her, Hei Ting ran down to the brook where the sun was setting. The water was full of laughing bubbles; the birds were singing their good-night song; the fields were full of growing trees. But Hei Ting had already forgotten them as she stood gazing happily downward. What she said was only,

"Ah-h-h, Big Feet!"



THE BLUE PENCIL

THE BLUE PENCIL

Mi Ding was setting the table with unusual care. At each place he arranged the silver; on the right a knife (thin blade in), next, a shining spoon. He paused to polish it a bit until it reflected his own nose, broad and flat, in its bowl. From the kitchen came the cook's voice.

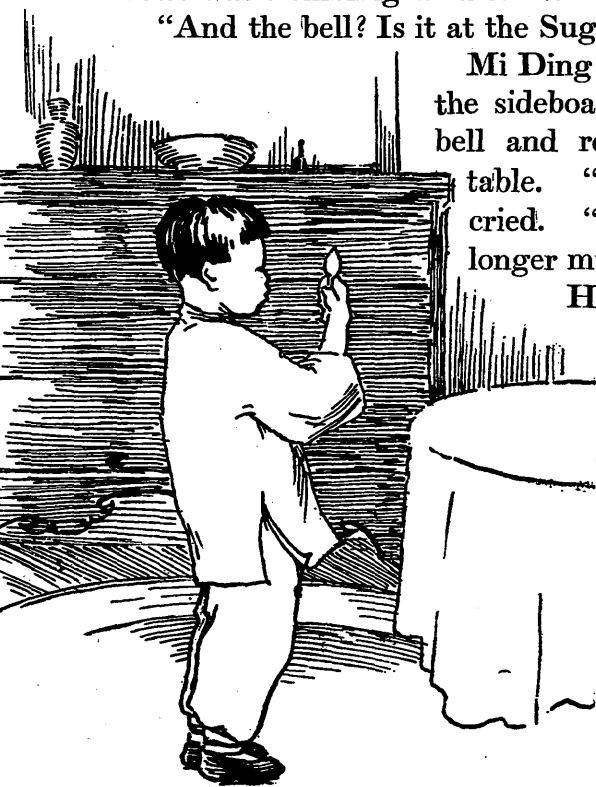
"The salt, Mi Ding, is it on?"

"I have remembered," the child answered. His voice was trembling with excitement.

"And the bell? Is it at the Sugu's place?"

Mi Ding scuffed over to the sideboard, located the bell and returned to the table. "It is on," he cried. "How much longer must we wait?"

He could hear the cook chuckle. "It isn't always," he teased, "that you are so anxious for the meal to begin. Many's the time I have



had to call you away from your balls or your books to set the table. Would that the Sugu came home *every* day, or else that you could graduate more often from the primary grades!"

Those were, indeed, the reasons why Mi Ding was so happy. It was the day of days, for he had at last completed his five grades of Primary work and was about to enter the Grammar division — that wonderful room on the second floor of the school, where one studied English and wrote with a pencil like an American boy, instead of painting letters with a brush as the Chinese writing was done. And the Sugu would soon be home to attend his graduating exercises and to present him with his first pencil. Not that she had told him she was going to give him one, but he had already seen it — the pencil — a shining blue one, with gilt letters on the side and a pink eraser on the top. It was in her first desk drawer, ready and waiting. She would soon be here to give it to him. Ever since the death of his parents a few years ago he had lived with the Sugu. He adored her, for she was really the only person in the whole world who had ever cared for him and loved him. She examined his ears, she helped him buy his clothes, she scolded him when he was naughty. But no matter what he did, she loved him. When she

was out touring in the country he missed her dreadfully. She was away much of the time, too, inspecting district schools. But every ten days or so she would come home, tired and worn out. That was the time Mi Ding loved best, for it was then, by serving her and running errands for her, that he was able to show her the love he could not otherwise express. This day of all days she had promised to return in time for the afternoon exercises.

He walked round the table inspecting his own work. Two places were set in perfect order — knives, forks, spoons. If the silver at one place shone a bit more brightly, only the keenest eye would have noticed it. For there was one other foreign teacher living there at the house. She had just recently come from America and Mi Ding did not understand her ways very well. She could speak but little Chinese yet, though that wasn't what bothered him. It was her rather stern manner. Often when he and the cook were calling back and forth to each other she would appear at the door to shake her head disapprovingly. When the Sugu was away in the country, the Other Sugu often examined his hands. Her glance was so penetrating that he felt as though the dirt almost grew on his knuckles under her sharp gaze. Today, though —

"How much more time is there?" he called out happily.

The cook had just begun to fry the meat so the sizzle of the fat interfered with the question. The child raised his voice. "One minute, or two or three?"

"Hu-h?" drawled the cook.

The Other Sugu stood in the doorway. She shook her head violently at Mi Ding, who grabbed the water pitcher as a way to escape from the room. She called him back. Again she shook her head at the table, holding up one finger. He stared at her for a moment, utterly perplexed. Then his voice became anguished with fear.

"Ai King, Ai King," he wailed to the cook. "Come here."

With his frying pan in one hand, his head wreathed in smoke, the cook came into the room. "Have you spilled the —" his voice died away into nothing at the sight of the Other Sugu. *He* didn't understand her either. She waved her hand distractedly. At last she came over to the table and swept away the silver from one place.

"Oh, oh, *oh!*" moaned the disappointed boy. "She promised to get here!" One huge tear rolled down his cheek. He had worked so hard getting ready for her. He'd polished the silver

so carefully; his hands and ears were so clean; his hair was like silk; and upstairs on the bed his fresh suit was all spread out, waiting for her approval. He'd washed it himself, even. No one else cared about his graduating — oh — ah — the pencil! *Every* boy had a pencil on his graduating day. He had been so sure she would remember. He had even confided to a few of his classmates what color it would be.

The day suddenly turned very black and heavy for Mi Ding. Mechanically he cleared away the extra place and answered the cook's final question dully. He tried to straighten his face when Ai King warned him not to look so sullen. He wasn't sullen; he was sad.

"Ring the bell, now."

Mi Ding gave it a disconsolate shake. In a few minutes the Other Sugu took her solitary place. His mind was wandering so far from bread and butter that the boy served her rather shabbily. She frowned at him severely when he forgot to pass the crackers with the soup. Out in the kitchen Ai King scowled at him when he was so slow with the dirty dishes. But Mi Ding didn't care. It wasn't their graduating day. They hadn't been waiting for the Sugu. They weren't expecting a blue pencil, with gilt lettering on the side. (All the other boys would laugh

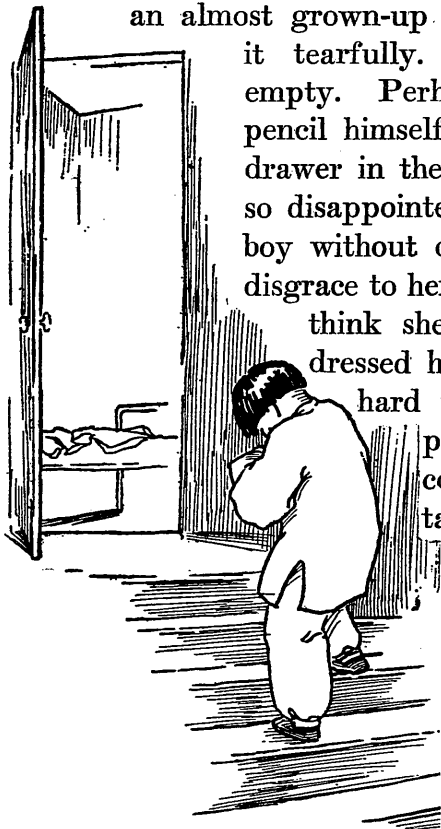
at him now, because he would be the only one without one. And he had hinted —)

Luncheon over, he began to help with the dishes. But the cook was a good-natured man, and he was sorry for Mi Ding.

"Run along," he said gruffly. "I'll put them away. Mind your nails and ears."

Mi Ding thanked him humbly, and went out. He climbed heavily to his room. Spread out on the bed, beside the starched trousers, was the coat. It had a pocket especially for a pencil — an almost grown-up pocket. Mi Ding eyed

it tearfully. It looked so awfully empty. Perhaps he'd better take the pencil himself — the one down in the drawer in the Sugu's study. She'd be so disappointed for him to be the only boy without one. Why, it would be a disgrace to her, really. The boys would think she didn't care. While he dressed he thought so long and so hard that by the time he had pulled on his socks he was convinced that he ought to take the pencil to save the reputation of the Sugu in the sight of the other children. Because he *had*



told them she was going to give him a pencil. And the pocket grew so big and so empty that when he put his coat on he couldn't see anything else. He could put it back in the drawer as soon as the exercises were finished. Nobody would know the difference.

His toilet complete, Mi Ding went downstairs slowly. The cook had left the kitchen. The Other Sugu had gone upstairs to rest. Of course, too, if they were there, he could explain, but since they weren't, he mustn't be late. He opened the door of the study almost stealthily. Once inside, the cool peace of the room surrounded him. He tried to take a deep breath, but his heart was beating so furiously that it was impossible. What made his legs so wobbly? He wasn't taking something that didn't belong to him — that is, something that wasn't going to belong to him when the Sugu returned. He was only doing it to save her in the eyes of the other children. Cautiously, he opened the drawer. There it lay, shining and expectant, at the very center! His fingers closed over it tightly. Then he glanced quickly around over his shoulder. But no, there was no one there. Strange he should feel as though she were in the room with him! He looked down at the pencil. It wasn't half so gaily bright as he had thought. When he

dropped it into his pocket and turned back toward the door his heart felt *so* heavy — as though the pencil were pressing against it.

“Oh, dear, oh, *dear!*” he thought wretchedly, as he stumbled along toward the school, “why didn’t she get here? Why has she failed? Anyway, I’m not going to fail her, and let the children think —”

“Fail *her!*” The words stuck in his throat. He began to wonder where the pencil had come from. Perhaps from the Sugu’s small brother, who lived in far-away America. He often sent her gifts like this one. The very best of all, the Sugu always called them, because she explained to Mi Ding that they were given with love. And that made them priceless, and very, very dear. Suppose something happened to this “gift of love” before he could put it back in the drawer. One of the other boys might steal it from him!

Mi Ding didn’t wait to suppose further. He forgot about graduation, he forgot about his starched trousers. In fact he forgot everything except that he *must* put that pencil back in its place before the Sugu arrived. His feet caught on the uneven stones. His eyes were smarting with tears. Even his breath seemed to stop. But his fingers clutched tightly to the pocket to hold

the pencil and his heart from jumping quite away from him. At last he reached the porch, where he tore open the door, not noticing how it slammed, as he burst into the study. How empty and forlorn it was! Mi Ding sobbed aloud as he jerked open the top drawer and dropped in the blue pencil along with a few hot tears. Then for a moment he stood still, his face quivering, his heart thumping. Somehow, in spite of the heat, the familiar cool peace of the room returned to rest him.

Rubbing his hands across his eyes, he took one last look at the desk before he hurried out to the street. The line had already formed by the time he arrived at school. He had barely time to slip into his own place, smooth down his trousers and take one deep breath, before the procession started. There were first the high school seniors, then the ninth graders, and last of all, his own small division. He sat through the exercises in a dazed fashion, his mind still on the Sugu. When his name was called he marched forward to make his bow and receive his certificate, feeling like the loneliest person in the whole world. In spite of his strongest effort, his breath would quiver, but he did manage to keep his lips firm through it all. Finally it was time to climb up on the plat-

form with all the others to sing the school song. From his place in the first row he looked down into the rows and rows of smiling faces. Brothers, and sisters, and fathers, and mothers, all so radiantly happy! His eyes moved toward the back of the room. Suddenly his heart turned right over and stopped. *She was there!* Sitting forward on her seat, she was smiling and nodding with the rest. Mi Ding felt as though he were floating right through the air to her, as their eyes met. Up went his shoulders. His whole soul went into the song they were singing about their school, their country and God.

He was a long time reaching her when the exercises were over, because she was so far back. Some of the boys kept stopping him to show off their new pencils. He inspected them hastily. He didn't care about pencils or erasers or anything else except that she was there. She had not failed him. At last he was beside her. Even then she was so busy talking to some poor fussing mother that he had to wait quite a little while. But she knew he was there, for she put out her hand and drew him close to her. Mi Ding was so completely content to be near her again that he could have waited forever. People brushed past and though he answered each bow

of greeting, not one tiny inch did he move from the Sugu. At last she turned.

"Mi Ding," she cried joyously, "did you think I wouldn't come?" She inspected his face so closely that he squirmed. "You didn't cry, did you, foolish little one?" she continued anxiously. "There was a poor woman who detained me, but I came as quickly as I could."

Mi Ding's eyes were suspiciously damp. Quickly she changed the subject.

"Mercy," she teased, "you're so advanced now, I suppose I shouldn't even mention tears. Are you ready for a pencil then?" she laughed.

Mi Ding swallowed manfully. He bent his head to regain his composure. And dear me, dear me, before he had time to raise it there was a sudden weight in his pocket. He looked over sidewise. There, oh, joy of joys, was the blue pencil, as shining and gay as he had first remembered it!

The Sugu was saying: "It is a very special one, Mi Ding. It will always help you to do your best, because my own little brother sent it all the way from America just for you. And he sent his love along with it, which makes it the perfect gift, you know."

Mi Ding, his heart ready to burst, could not

answer her. Instead he clutched her hand the more tightly, because he, too, understood now that love was best of all.



THE TOY MAKER

THE TOY MAKER

“Ai — *ai*, Heng-E, come out here to the front of the shop, thou useless one! With what words now hast thou frightened little Seng-E, thy brother?” The woodcutter’s voice was gruff and sharp. At the back of the shop, his small daughter Heng-E stopped her story and shoved her way out from between eager listeners. She had been inventing a tale to amuse the neighborhood children, and as usual her imagination had outdone itself, so that instead of amusing, she had frightened. When she had reached the place of the tiger’s jumping from his hole to carry off three children *at once* in his mighty jaws, Seng-E had set up a wail of horror. Her father had heard it of course. At the sound of *his* voice, the children began to scatter. There was nothing for it but Heng-E must go out and take her scolding. She pushed her way into the dingy shop. Her father glared at her.

“Would that a tiger had *thee* in his jaws — almost, worthless one, thou. Only this noon the rice was burned — and now more tales!” He tossed a small silver piece in her direction. “Get out to the street to buy a bit of fish for the evening meal. See that thou loiterest not on the corners to learn fresh tales of tigers and devils.”

Heng-E stooped to pick up the money nor did she raise her head as she turned toward the back of the shop. It would be shorter to go past her father out on to the main road, but she feared more rebukes from the neighbors. Why did her stories always have to frighten the younger children? She was sorry, too. She did not wish to be mean. Only she saw things so vividly in her mind that she had to tell them. Then the rice. She hadn't meant to let it burn — but she had been dreaming, as usual. An eight-year-old girl ought not to dream when she was cooking rice, though, Heng-E knew.

She started out now across the fields. It was early fall. Far beyond the plains, Heng-E watched the shadows on the mountains. This afternoon there was a weird purple about them that gave her a queer feeling as though some unusual thing were about to happen. Nothing did; men sang in the rice fields; water buffalo lifted their heads to "hoof" at her as she passed them, wallowing up to their necks in the dirty canal water. She was rounding the corner which would take her to the fish market, when a crowd of children on the opposite side of the road caught her eye. Curious in all things but especially where there were children, Heng-E darted in between hurrying 'rickshas to the other side.

Standing on tiptoe, she peered into the ring. Joy of joys! It was the Toy Maker — the man who made candy toys for a penny apiece. Forgotten was fish — and father and fairies — as she pushed her way into the very center of the throng. There, bent over a small table piled with bits of sugar putty and water color, of molds half-opened or closed, filled with bits of colored candy, an old man bent low at his task. He seemed oblivious of the crowding eager children, clutching their dirty coppers while they waited impatiently for a bit of sweetmeat. None dared push too close. Only Heng-E ran to his very side, tugging at his worn gray sleeve as she called,

“The day’s greeting, the day’s greeting, honorable one. Hast eaten thy rice?”



The Toy Maker continued to insert a piece of gray sugar into a mold; he took a second piece for the tail; twin dots of hard brown sugar he used for eyes. Then, clamping the mold tightly together, he held it thus. His audience was breathless until at length he opened the mold to disclose the liveliest gray mouse, all of sugar from its glinty eyes to its curved pink tail. He placed it deliberately and gently in the hands of a happy child. At last he raised his eyes to Heng-E.

"The day's blessing, useless one. Whither bound?"

The Toy Maker and Heng-E had been friends for ever so long now, since he had first come to this street and put up his stand. One could never tell when he would come or how long he would stay or how many toys he would make. He was extremely independent. If the children pushed too near or grew impatient or tried to cheat each other, he was apt to close up his stand and move off altogether — not returning for a long time. Heng-E was usually able to keep the younger children in order while she counted his coppers for him to see that all was fair. It was a mutual partnership, for in return she was granted the special favor of standing at his very side. She answered him now.

"For fish — but there is no hurry. It matters not."

"Then stand here a bit and urge these children to silence. My brain wearies of their prattle. Besides they shake my hand just when I would steady it to draw a face. Children are worthless ones."

Though his tone was querulous, Heng-E could see his eyes twinkle, so she knew he was not angry yet. She stood at his side for some time watching the wonders he performed with lumps of dead stuff that became dancing mice or scarlet persimmons or curling lotus buds. It was fascinating. So much so, that no one of the children even noticed the approach of two young foreign women.

At the American mission school close by, the fall session had started that very afternoon. All day long in a stuffy office, the Young Secretary had been counting silver dollars and passing out receipts along with her smiles of welcome. She was tired. Finally — about the same time Heng-E's father had sent *her* out on an errand — the Young Secretary turned to the Birthday Lady who sat beside her desk. The Birthday Lady really was another young missionary, living here at the school compound for a year to

study Chinese as well as to keep the Young Secretary from being too lonesome. The latter shut down her desk with a bang.

"Whew, I'm dead!" she groaned. "If I have to ring another dollar or inspect its stamp to see if it's good silver, I'll turn into one." She glanced out the window. "Look at those mountains. Did you ever see such gorgeous purple? I know what. Let's walk out toward them. There's a full hour before your birthday party. What say you?"

The Birthday Lady jumped up and clapped her hands.

"Let's! That will be the nicest present yet. All the children will be out and mothers will be sitting on their doorsteps and —"

The Young Secretary didn't wait for more.

"We may even find the Spirit of the Street. Who knows?" she laughed.

At the dining-room door they paused long enough to inspect the table where Daik Gwong was carefully setting ten places for the birthday dinner. Then, canes in hand (against unfriendly dogs), they sallied forth.

The streets were indeed full. Children called, "The day's blessing — the day's blessing." Sometimes a naughty one would shriek "Son of a foreign devil!" to be hastily cuffed by his mother,

who smiled an apology for her son's rudeness. Crying babies dried their tears at sight of such



queer beings with faded skin and long swinging gait. Laughing and nodding they rounded the corner toward the mountains. There, they too saw the group of children. No less curious than Heng-E they drew near. The Toy Maker had just opened a mold to take out a diminutive Chinese war god, perfect in every detail, from his golden robes to his dragon lance. The chil-

dren gasped with joy. So did the two strangers.

"Oh, oh, oh, how perfectly darling!"

At the sound of foreign words, the children turned and grinned. Heng-E looked most friendly. Her eyes were so dancing and so bright, her air of importance so secure that with correct instinct the Young Secretary spoke to her.

"Does he make many of them?"

Heng-E answered briefly: "Yes, when he is not angry or the children do not push. I keep them quiet."

The Young Secretary nodded gravely.

"Do you suppose he'd make some for me?"

Heng-E considered the matter. "We-ell, all these children are waiting. I'll ask him though. How many do you wish? They're a copper apiece, you know," she added grandly.

"Oh, mercy!" said the Young Secretary. "Well, you tell him I'd gladly pay a double dime for ten."

All the children answered that!

"A *whole* double dime! That's *forty* coppers."

The Toy Maker himself might have been stone deaf. Throughout this amazing conversation he had made no sign. Now, however, as Heng-E pulled excitedly at his sleeve he appeared to listen to her rapid chatter. When she had finished,

he raised his head. The Young Secretary thought she had never seen a finer face — although it was distressingly thin. His eyes snapped indignantly and his voice quavered.

“Ten, — *ten*,” he repeated, as though he had been asked an outrageous thing. “TEN — with these children waiting and the dusk all ready to fall?”

The Young Secretary looked her disappointment. She was plainly bewildered.

“I will gladly pay more.”

The Toy Maker bent his head, grumbling. Heng-E answered for him. Her face was puckered with disappointment too. She felt the Young Secretary’s embarrassment.

“He says he has already gathered enough money today for tomorrow’s rice. Nothing else matters.”

“Oh — very well.”

“Did you want them especially?” Heng-E continued.

“Well, yes. You see there is to be a party tonight for this lady.” She nodded toward the Birthday Lady, who of course did not understand one word of the entire conversation. “She’s just new in this country and I only wished to make her happy.”

Heng-E reached her decision quickly. “I’ll

manage him," she confided softly. "I can. Don't you wait. I know where your compound is. My cousin Ai Hua goes there to school. I'll bring the toys to you later."

The Young Secretary's face brightened. She fished in her pocket for a money piece.

"Oh, no," Heng-E assured her. "Wait until I bring them."

They parted. It was so late after their walk that the two foreigners went back to their compound through the fields, without once touching the main road. In response to the Young Secretary's question about Heng-E, the old gateman shook his head vigorously. None but school children had entered, he knew, but he promised to watch carefully and bring her up to the house should she come. Time for dinner came; guests arrived, and the Young Secretary tried to conceal her disappointment.

"I guess she couldn't manage him after all."

The boy, Daik Gwong, had just thrown wide the dining-room door with its festive table when the Young Secretary heard a tap at the porch. Hurrying out she found a rather abashed Heng-E, — her hands clasping the sticky toys.

"Child alive!" cried the Young Secretary. "It's long past dark. Have you waited all that time?"

The answer was simple.

"I promised. The Toy Maker waits at the gate. He is angry because I made him come for the money. He said it didn't matter. He only wished his rice."

"But — your father? Does he know you are out this late?"

Heng-E hung her head. "He will be angry — I was sent to buy fish."

It didn't take the Young Secretary long to pay the old man and to explain the situation to her guests. In spite of Heng-E's embarrassment she insisted on taking her home. As they walked along, the Young Secretary pieced together a great deal of family information: how Heng-E envied her cousin, Ai Hua, at school; how the rice burned; how her stories frightened the younger children. By the time they had stopped in front of the wood shop, Heng-E was frankly trembling. The Young Secretary felt squeamish, herself. The shop was boarded up for the night. She managed to knock firmly on the thick boards, however. A scuff and a gruff voice demanding their business was the reply. It was Heng-E's father. He opened the door a crack. At sight of his daughter, his voice roared with anger. He threatened her with everything from a severe whipping to handing her over to devils.

When he saw the Young Secretary he grew a bit civil, but he only let them in grudgingly. He turned then to the child.

“Didst catch the fish in the river and clean them there? Hast been off with evil spirits learning more tales to tell? Out of my house. Out! I can bear with you no longer.”

There was nothing to stop his rage. He let it go its full length. At last quieted a bit, he faced the Young Secretary, confiding all his woes. He was a poor man, with a useless daughter who let the rice burn while she horrified the neighborhood with some spirit-story — or else ran off with every beggar who needed help. On and on.

The Young Secretary sympathized with him, shook her head with great understanding, but remained discreetly silent until she could collect enough Chinese words to answer. Then she explained that the fault was hers. He refused the explanation. She persisted, however, until he was finally more reasonable. And then she began to urge her own point. It was the same old task of persuading an unwilling father to let his child go to school. She began complimenting him on his brilliant sons — an excellent beginning. Then she turned to the subject of Ai Hua, the small cousin — and how well she was doing in the third grade. Now one thing greater than

this poor man's temper was his pride. It had made him uncomfortable ever since his younger brother had sent his daughter to school. But Heng-E —! What could she learn? She was a nuisance around the house, to be sure, but he felt he could manage her until it was time to send the boys to school. Then he might sell her off. The idea, which this foreign person suggested, that if Heng-E went to school now she might later help her brothers at their lessons, had not occurred to him. That and his pride prevailed. Heng-E promised to tell no more stories until after she had been to school for a term; and the very next morning she entered the high green gate of learning.

A year later, on the opening day, the Young Secretary was alone. The Birthday Lady had gone way up into the country to teach in a remote district. The Young Secretary missed her. There would be no party that night. All day long as she had been greeting the school girls, listening to their happy vacation tales, her own heart had been heavy. She was wrapping up piles of money after the last girl had gone, when a scuff made her turn. There stood Heng-E, grown taller by several inches — the same bright eagerness in her eyes.

"Good afternoon, Heng-E," the Young Sec-

retary said. "I'm so glad your father is happy for you to return another year." She noticed a package in the child's hand. "Did you bring your money?"

Heng-E stepped forward, bowing as she came. "My father is very happy to have me return to school." Her eyes sparkled. "The rice burned only once this summer, and my small brothers liked the kind of stories you taught me."

She drew in her breath rapidly.

"It — it was just a year ago today when I first saw you — when the Toy Maker was here. Do you remember? There was another lady — the Birthday Lady, you called her."

The other nodded, not wanting to speak.

"Well, I have remembered, too. I knew she had gone to the country, but I watched all summer for the Toy Maker, just the same. He comes this way no more. He is too old. So — I — I made a few little things from paper, the way we learned — boats and fish and mice." She shoved a handful of crumpled paper toys into the Young Secretary's lap. "I thought perhaps as long as I couldn't find the others, these might do. Could you send them to her?"

Then overcome by her own boldness, Heng-E bowed her way back to the door. There she saw the Young Secretary was really crying.

"Oh, please don't be sad," she added softly. "I will give my best for you — here at school. I will work as carefully as — the old Toy Maker himself. Nothing else matters."

And after that, even with the Birthday Lady so far away, the Young Secretary could never be quite lonely.



THE SWEET-POTATO SONG

THE SWEET-POTATO SONG

"O-h, what a golden morning!" cried small Pee Lang, as she poked pieces of charcoal under the black kettle. She looked out across the fields. "Every one seems to be gathering rice today. I can hear the coolies singing way out on the plain."

"Singing," grumbled her mother, hacking off bits of kindling; "singing — you're always hearing singing when there's work to be done. Mind the fire, will you. You must sell a whole bag of potatoes today. A body would think winter *wasn't* coming, and we with no rice to harvest, our home burned to the ground; nothing left but a few bags of vegetables to cook and sell. If you'd sing less and think more, I'd be happier — and richer."

Pee Lang sighed. It was true: either she was singing or wanting to, most of the time. Her mother's voice grew harsh whenever the word was mentioned. At times she feared her mother, with her hard face and harsher words. Life had made her that way, taking away her husband and her home, leaving nothing against her old age but this one scrawny, big-eyed daughter who cared for little save singing and dreaming. Day after day the two of them stood under the big tree

half-way into the city, steaming sweet potatoes in a crude kettle, scarcely earning enough coppers to feed them from one day to the next. It was a hard life, with no room for song, the mother thought.

But it helped Pee Lang, who found the days tiresome when there was nothing else to do but tend fires or urge passers-by to indulge in a sweet potato just for the money they would give her. Often she forgot all about the people, to be sure, while she watched wee birds make nests in the huge tree; or as she looked far out across the smooth plains to the mountains.

"Come and climb us," they seemed to call. Singing made her feel sometimes as though she *were* climbing.

There were soldiers, too, rough men who frightened her when they went by, and small boys who tried to upset the stove or steal coppers. Singing gave her courage and made her feel less tiny.

She squatted on the ground and blew strenuously until the charcoal began to glow. It was such a glorious day! She felt all tingling inside. She would sell, oh so many — if only she could sing. Her mother lifted the cover from the moon-shaped dish, where a dozen or more soft golden potatoes were all ready to pop out of their skins.

"Most done, now," she fussed, "and I've not had my morning tea. I suppose if I leave you with them you'll let them steam to nothing, while you gaze off into space."

Pee Lang scrambled to her feet. Even then, she was so tiny you could scarcely see her head above the stove.

"Oh, no, mother," she promised, "I'll watch quite carefully, and sell just as *many*. The morning is so beautiful I think people will be happy to buy. It is a long walk still from here to the city. I will urge them all. Please go drink your tea."

"Well, then, mind the fire, move your fingers nimbly, but *don't* spend the time thinking up songs or such foolishness," admonished the mother as she pulled down her coat, smoothed her hair and started out across the street to a neighboring tea shop.

Left alone, Pee Lang gazed at the fields again. It was, she reiterated, a golden day. She lifted the lid of the kettle. Golden, she thought, just like the sweet potatoes. She poked them about gingerly. One must work quickly or be burned by the steam. M-m-m-m! They felt so soft and round.

"I should think anybody'd want one. Only a copper apiece. Besides, a copper's so dirty and

old — not a golden brown at all. Why, *oh* — me!” she added, laughing out loud, “that nearly makes a song.” She clapped her hands together. Her eyes sparkled as she hummed,

“Sweet potatoes, sweet potatoes,
Golden brown —
All for a copper, fat and round.”

She cocked her head on one side. “That’s not quite enough to make them sell,” she mused; “oh, I know, I know.” She jumped up and down gaily.

“I’ve the sweet potatoes,
You’ve the copper round;
You give me one — I’ll give you one,
On your way to town.”

It was a merry little rhyme, exactly suiting her feelings. She danced about happily, when a sudden tug at her ankle nearly knocked her over against the hot stove. She turned startled eyes on the grinning face of a small boy who was always appearing from nowhere to tease her or steal a few vegetables.

“Singing again,” he taunted. “I’ll wager you don’t sing when your mother’s near by. I heard

her scolding you. What's the good of a girl, anyway, except to cook rice or sew coats? Huh

— you wait! You'll be singing a different tune in a minute.

The soldiers are coming — a whole troop of them. They'll

help themselves to your old potatoes. *Then* your

mother'll be happy.

They'll take all you've got, and leave you an

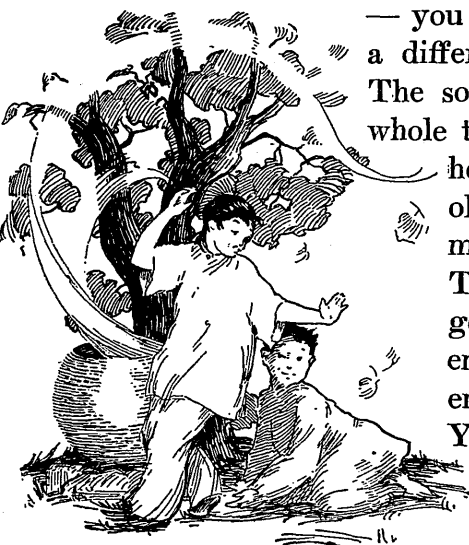
empty kettle and an empty 'copper' bowl.

You'll see."

Pee Lang looked as though she were seeing it already. She

particularly feared I-Chang with his frightening tales about the soldiers. Her mother could manage them. When *she* was there they never dared help themselves, but Pee Lang alone could never stop them. They were too big and gruff. They laughed so coarsely. She stared in dismay at I-Chang, edging nearer the kettle to poke off the lid. But Pee Lang was as quick as she was little.

"You'll burn your fingers," she cried in a truly anxious voice. "Besides, you had plenty of rice



this morning. *Anyway*," I-Chang was shoving her away from the stove, "anyway, you must give me a copper first."

The boy only laughed. "Yes," he teased, "I heard you singing that. Well, maybe I will burn my fingers; maybe you can keep me from eating your silly potatoes (they're soggy, I bet), but when the soldiers come — I'm going to wait for them too, behind the tree, so they won't catch me."

Pee Lang's eyes grew big again at that word "catch." I-Chang seized the opportunity.

"Probably they will take you, so you can cook potatoes for them all the time. They do take girls. You're so puny they can divide you up and put parts of you in each pocket."

He danced about her, tormentingly near the stove. At that very moment from the distance came the sound of "*Ur, bang, sang, sah*" — left, right, left, right. I-Chang's expression and movements suddenly changed. He scudded quickly into a convenient hollow around back of the tree. Pee Lang gazed fearfully at the bend of the road.

It was true. The soldiers were coming; whole waves of them like so many miles of gray insects pressing down upon her. Lately they had been coming more and more frequently past the big

tree on their way to the city camp. They were always so hungry; they never stopped to ask the price, even, but seemed to think this was a free stand. Her mother — oh, dear, the last time, they had taken nearly a whole day's supply. Pee Lang's throat grew tight. Her knees wobbled. Then she looked out over the plain in the golden sunlight far across to the mountains so strong and high.

"I guess," she trembled, "I guess the best thing I can do is to sing because that keeps me from being too frightened. It kept I-Chang from getting the potatoes." Deftly she slid off the top of the kettle to insert a new row of raw vegetables. "There. They'll have to wait for these to cook. That'll help some," she decided. Once more she ducked under the stand, picking up a small bronze bowl which she polished vigorously. "I'll have the 'copper' bowl ready, too. And I'll hold it out to them — way out, so they'll surely see it. They won't want to burn their own fingers, either; so if I hold down the lid with my other hand and make them wait till I've sung the song, perhaps — perhaps they'll pay, after all."

She hummed frantically at the little tune. In another minute the gray line was upon her.

"Halt!" shouted the officer in charge, welcoming the shade. "Company at ease."

The soldiers let up a shout.

"Look at the little midget," cried one.



"Cooking our breakfast for us," teased another.

"Let's put her in the kettle for seasoning," and so on.

Behind the tree I-Chang snickered. Pee Lang was dumb.

"What — ho — a girl without a tongue?" swaggered one huge fellow, coming close to the fire. "She'll grow that, fast enough. What's cooking? Off with the lid!"

Pee Lang, her eyes still cast downward, shook her head.

"They're still raw," she quavered.

“*‘They’*; what’s *‘they’*? Move quickly. I’m hungry,” the man bellowed.

Pee Lang gulped and swallowed. Here if at all was her chance. If a song could do anything it must be now. With one hand still clutching the lid until her fingers were all but burnt off, she picked up the shining bowl with her other hand, holding it far in front of her as she raised her eyes to the gaze of all those teasing men. She was so very little — so very tiny and sweet that some of the soldiers began to think of their own small sisters who tended smaller brothers, who ran endless errands for which they were cuffed and scolded endlessly. Pee Lang looked beyond them, then, at the mountains, still so strong. The men weren’t so awful. She leaned out across the pot. In a clear high voice she sang,

“Sweet potatoes, sweet potatoes,
Golden brown —
All for a copper, fat and round —”

“Oh-ho, so that’s the tune,” cried one greedy-looking fellow.

Pee Lang smiled straight at him.

“I’ve the sweet potatoes,
You’ve the copper round;
You give me one — I’ll give you one —
On your way to town.”

With her other hand she lifted the lid. The potatoes themselves must have understood, for they were a luscious, steaming, popping, golden brown. The men gave one long sound. Hands flew to pockets; the men pressed forward. In no time at all, the "copper" bowl was filled to the brim. The pot was empty. Pee Lang herself was hoarse and breathless from singing, for whenever she had stopped just to swallow, the soldiers called for more. At last every single potato was gone (not a scrap left for greedy I-Chang).

The officer stood at attention, gave a sharp command and the line moved toward the city.

Pee Lang was still eying the emptied kettle when her mother came hurrying back across the street. The harshness was gone from her face.

"*You would* sing," she said softly; "it's foolish to try to stop you. I saw those men coming, but couldn't get back in time. I heard it all."

She took the bowl from Pee Lang's stiff fingers. "Well," she concluded, "if singing will get you winter's rice, — sing away. Only mind, mind it *does* buy the rice."

Pee Lang's face had brightened slightly. She lifted her chin ever so slightly. Her eyes were far away.

“Oh, but listen,” she breathed; “listen. They’re singing it, too.”

Faintly came the sound of soldier voices, —

“You give me one — I’ll give you one —
On your way to town.”



LO! THE JOYFUL SOUND

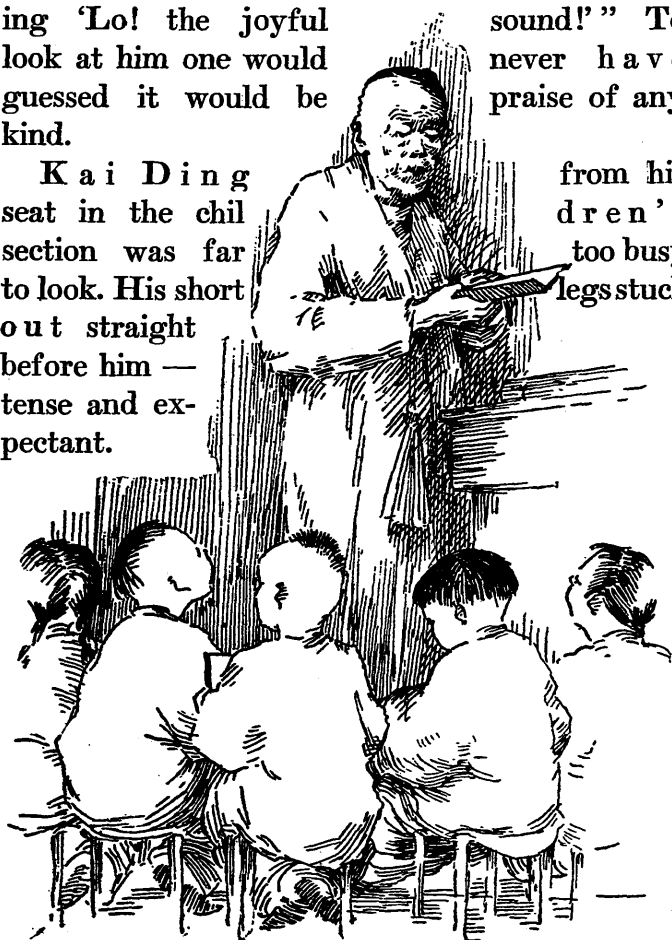
LO! THE JOYFUL SOUND

The old Chinese pastor took his place behind the pulpit of the small Christian church. In the heavy gray of the morning his face sagged; his fan drooped limply; his moldy skull cap was askew.

"We will praise God," he mumbled, "by singing 'Lo! the joyful sound!'" To look at him one would never have guessed it would be praise of any kind.

Kai Ding sat in the children's section was far too busy to look. His short legs stuck out straight before him — tense and expectant.

from his
dren's
too busy
legs stuck



"Number 86 — 86 —" he chanted excitedly, turning the scrubby pages of his hymnal. "There." At last he had found the proper place. Then, his face burning like a bright yellow candle, he looked up eagerly. But not in the pastor's direction! His eyes were following the movements of the foreign Sugu at the organ, who was also struggling through a hymnal.

"She's found it now. Will she remember to look at me just once?" He watched her fasten the book on the organ rack, pull out the stops, arrange her feet for their strenuous pumping (it was hard work getting more than a squeak from that baby organ) — and *then*, she turned toward him and smiled.

That smile had transformed Kai Ding's life from a mere existence into a glowing reality. It warmed him, gave him a proof of her love, made him eager to give back every bit of himself to the Sugu; made it possible for him to manage the monotonous days in his father's brass-forging — while other boys of his age were in school — by looking forward to the time once a week when he should see her. Kai Ding lived in a poor family where words were few and rice was watery and work was forever! Futile even to think of going to school. Yet, Kai Ding craved it with all his stunted little soul.

Then one day while he was gambling his *cash* with some other small boys, he had heard the sound of singing close by.

"The Christians —" one boy had said scornfully, "at their once-a-week school."

"I'm going to see." Kai Ding had ventured as far as the very doorway of the church. A school-girl came over to him.

"Won't you come in, now?" she suggested. "They're just going to tell a story."

Without waiting to be urged, Kai Ding followed her inside — and thus began his meager schooling. From then on, week after week, he learned to count Sunday as different from other days, and without telling his parents, he attended the Sunday school quite regularly. Once his first shyness was conquered, he even went over to the organ where the foreign teacher sat. She had such soft hair, such deep brown eyes that he had never been able to fear her as his parents had taught him to fear the "foreign devils."

"Will you teach me to read?" he had begged. "It seems to take you a long time to find the numbers, too." His faith was so sure, his eyes so trusting, his pinched face so eager, that Anne Holway did not dare disappoint him, even though she could scarcely read the numbers herself.

"Of course I'll help you," she had promised;

"every week if you come a little early, we'll learn all the numbers together. Maybe, maybe, if we work hard enough, we shall be able to learn to read a whole hymn sometime!"

Such a promise! And this morning they had at last accomplished this very thing. They had mastered all the characters of one hymn — the very one the pastor had just called out.

So passionate was Kai Ding's desire for knowledge, so warming was Anne Holway's love, that this dilapidated church with its bareness and its unswept corners had become for him a perfect world where love and knowledge grew together in boundless supply.

"We'll learn so much," he thought happily now, as he smiled back at his teacher.

His smile warmed Anne Holway herself so that she forgot the depressing dampness of the day, forgot the ancient pastor and his mumbling. She pumped the organ with such vigor that it gave forth a fairly full-sized tone. Tempestuously, amid the wailing of babies, the talking mothers, the yawning men, "Lo! the joyful sound" swelled forth throughout the room.

The next instant a sudden splitting of wood — a deafening crash — darkness! Kai Ding was completely unaware of impending danger. He had been too eagerly watching the Sugu's

face to notice the shaking walls, and run for the door as most of the congregation had done. He *could* recall afterward that hideous sound, as though all the watching dragons on the nearby roofs had descended together to wreak their vengeance on this hated foreign religion in their midst. When the roof fell on him, pushing him backward and down, all he saw was the orange hat of his precious Sugu, hurled from her head by an ugly beam which settled itself over her whole body. He started to reach her, but the darkness came first.

He was still struggling when consciousness returned. For a moment the frightful chaos about him numbed all thought. Even accustomed as he was to the sound of yelling and screaming, *this* noise of anguished voices and scrambling feet and cracking timber was so overwhelming that he lay quite still.

"Useless to call out in such — *ai ja* — they are cutting my body in pieces. Knives — *ai ja* — with knives!" Every scream in the room was like another knife sawing its way through his right leg (was it *his* leg?) — splitting it, *hacking* at it until it was cut into ten legs! With every fresh dart of pain his mind cut out the question,

"The Sugu — where is she? That beam! — The Sugu — I *must* reach her."

With intense agony he lifted his head in the direction of her organ. *There was no organ!*

There was not even one whole piece of wood. If there was no organ, if there was no organ — if — there — was — no — what had happened to her? Could he never reach her? He must reach her. He *must!* She was the only thing in all the world that mattered. He loved her. The others were calling for themselves. They did not care as he did. Oh — he must! Frantically he put his hands beneath him and pushed. They slipped against the slime — his leg was caught tightly under a beam. The pain dug deeper, became unendurable, yet still increased. He was being torn in two — ah — *cut* in two with those knives — knives racing now through his leg, now through his mind until at last they became an all-consuming agony. Then, the pains woven together into one excruciating whole, they were suddenly ripped apart again as everywhere above the confusion he heard voices calling her name. Wailing — shrieking — a few were praying —

“The Sugu — ah — the Sugu.” And then — silence. It was the silence that told him what he did not want to know. Pain could be great, fear awful; but as long as any noise remained,

things had not reached their limit. There would still be life. Silence told the end.

With one excruciating effort he raised himself until he could see. From under the ruin of the organ some schoolgirls, their uniforms torn and mud-spattered, were silently helping four young theological students dig out what was left. One agonized glance was all Kai Ding could endure before he turned his head and closed his eyes, trying to force back the swift rush of darkness that enveloped him so completely, though it left his mind cruelly clear. It was all finished. *ALL*. A racking pain centered itself in his throat. No longer able to detach himself from his suffering he lay there motionless, his eyes closed, hoping for the end of it, — when someone stumbled against him, calling his name. Another person came, lifting his shoulders cruelly. Would they tear his body apart? It mattered little.

"Ai-ja," cried one, "his leg is broken."

"Almost off," affirmed the other, sucking in his breath.

His leg, thought Kai Ding — his *leg*! A *thousand* legs perhaps, but never one! Not with such pain. And the darkness. Could he never pierce his way through it to reach them, to tell them to let him die in peace? A darkness so blinding that it crushed out his breath, pushing him down

— down — down. Far above it he heard his mother's voice, sharp and querulous in the outer court. She came stumbling in over the broken tiles and boards.

"He is about to die," she announced, peering down into her son's face.

"Kai Ding," she leaned closer, "Kai Ding, can you eat?"

He could not quite reach through the darkness to answer her. Not even when his father dragged him out from under those pressing beams could he open his eyes.

"Just once," he thought — "just once —" and then a wail broke forth:

"The Sugu — ai-ja — the Sugu —" The last tiny spark went dead within him.

He managed to open his eyes at last. The darkness was still there. But something familiar about it now loosened his fear. He recognized a small crack of light running in a silver line above his head.

"That's where the wall never quite joined," he thought. Over in the corner, lower down, a round white hole.

"The rat's hole — is it in or out, I wonder?" Ah, yes; he was on the bed in his own room (if a black space could be called a room). Kai Ding

was so used to it that it almost made the pain easier to bear here. He could hear the rumble of his parents' voices out in the front court. They were talking price, he could tell, debating whether to send him to a medicine shop or call a doctor to the house or let the leg heal itself. Their voices grew intense; his mother's shrill, his father's angry. Kai Ding dozed.

His parents were angry, indeed. A neighbor, a Christian woman, trying to placate them with additional news, only kindled their wrath. Even the unexpected arrival of a foreign Sugu and Sing Sang who came to offer help only seemed to make their antagonism the more bitter.

"We have found all the other children are being cared for," Gene Stratford had volunteered. "Perhaps we can help with Kai Ding. He has suffered the most." But they resisted her stubbornly.

The neighbor woman continued.

"It can't be helped now," she urged. "Be thankful he wasn't killed. Besides, they weren't hurting him there. They were only teaching him how to read."

"Read," grumbled his father, "read! All the world is mad with reading. What need has a boy for books in a brass-forged? Haven't I cuffed him and cursed him enough for that already?"

"Ya," shrilled his mother. "Isn't the boy forever picking up dirty papers from the streets puzzling out the characters — when he ought to be hammering brass?"

"It's a good sign," persisted the neighbor. "Confucius himself —"

"A good sign, a good sign! Is it a *sign* he will chisel his brass the finer? It is only a sign that I gave him too much leisure and too many *cash* to gamble away on the street corners. That's what it's a sign of. — What was he doing in the house of the foreign devils learning their doctrine?"

Gene Stratford stepped forward about this time. "He *was* there, anyway. So of course we wish to help you now. Has the doctor set his leg yet, or will you let us take him into the hospital? We shall be happy to bear the expense in either case."

They stared at her silently.

"Of course," she continued, "of course you are worried. He must be suffering greatly, too. Besides it would be a pity if his leg were not carefully set — since he needs strong muscles to work at the forge." Outwardly smiling, inwardly seething, she persuaded them at last to let Kai Ding be taken into the hospital. Even so, tea had to be consumed before the

mother would lead her into that dark rear room.

Kai Ding, roused by the flickering lamp his mother held near his face, looked up. He could distinguish two great blue eyes, looking down on him with such compassion and understanding that he thought of his own Sugu and closed his eyes in agony.

"So brave you are, dear Kai Ding," this one was saying, "alone here in the dark. Will you come with me into the foreign hospital? The doctor has invited you."

Kai Ding stared up at her. "I could not walk all that way," he trembled.

The Sugu nodded gravely. "I know," she agreed. "But a Sing Sang is here to carry you. He has lifted boys before, so he will know how to be careful of the pain."

Kai Ding's eyes sought his mother's this time, questioning her.

"The Sugu says the foreign doctor will make your leg straight. The church will pay the bills," she explained bluntly.

An hour later, borne gently through the streets by a tall foreign man, Kai Ding arrived at the hospital. The light-haired doctor was in the corridor, waiting.

"So this is the brave one," she smiled. "Take

him right up to the second floor. His room is ready."

Kai Ding remembered the rest vaguely. They carried him into a room too white for one accustomed to darkness, and lowered him to a bed far too soft when one is used to boards. He felt them cutting off his clothes.

"Mother will be angry," he thought.

Something sickish and sweet was placed over his nose and mouth. Far in the distance he heard the doctor's voice. "Breathe deeply," she urged. "Breathe deeply — and peacefully dream."

They weren't peaceful at all, those dreams. Characters danced before his eyes.

"See our sharp corners," they cried. "Feel them." And they danced against him with their knifelike legs. "We are wood and tile and we'll catch you — catch you — you cannot run — you cannot run." After tormenting him, they would chase off for the Sugu. She never saw them coming. Kai Ding tried to warn her.

"Look out," he would call, but his voice was only a gurgle; and they would kaleidoscope down upon her, burying her from sight.

"I must reach her, I must!" he cried. But as he strained, a whole pile of them, grotesque and grinning hideously, would knock him down, pressing him backward while he struggled help-

lessly. Gradually, since they did not move, he adjusted himself to their pressure and ceased to struggle to free himself. The pain became more real — more like an ordinary hurt — the Sugu faded into nothingness. Slowly, so slowly, he opened his eyes.

At first the dazzling whiteness of the room made him squint.

"It hurts," he cried to himself. "It is all too clean. But I must never let them know." He missed the familiar dirt, and it was a long time before he learned to rest and relax in this atmosphere of cool peace. Nothing but the memory of the Sugu bound him in any way to his former life. Since he knew she was dead, all desire to live had left him.

"Never again will my parents allow me to enter the church" — he thought that so many times during the long days. Then, "But there is no church now," a cruel inner voice would remind him. "There *is* no church, there *is* no organ, there *is* no Sugu, there is no one else to teach you." — "Oh, and she loved me," he wailed desolately. What did he care about having a straight leg if he were for no use save to hammer brass? After the day was done, nothing to do but eat rice from dirty bowls with all the smaller brothers and sisters who shoved the food into

their mouths greedily, hoping to finish first and grab the left-overs.

The dark-haired nurse was so kind, too. Every morning she bathed him, although Kai Ding assured her she didn't need to trouble so often. He didn't talk to her very much but once he said,

"Why do you change my bed-coat every day, before the last one is even wrinkled?"

"To help you eat your rice," was the puzzling reply she had given. How did clean clothes help a person to eat, he wondered?

"I don't think you like our rice," she had said after he had passed back an almost full bowl.

"But I do," he cried shamedly; "but I do. Only there is nothing inside me that wants to be fed."

"You are waiting for the spring birds, I think. Is that what you dream of all day long, and try to catch at night? Perhaps, when they come, hunger will return to you, too."

He smiled wearily and turned his head away. He knew she wanted him to tell her what was troubling him. And oh, he did so want to talk to her about it — to explain his love for the Sugu, the heavy sorrow of his heart, now she was gone. But he couldn't bear to hear any one say that hideous word — that she was — dead! He suffered alone, instead.

At night it was the worst. Dancing, running, distorted characters persisted their chase every time he tried to sleep. Always they would trample down the Sugu before he could reach her. Desperately he would call out her name. It was useless. The torture continued until he awoke to see the nurse bending over him, comforting him silently.

One morning after an especially hideous nightmare, the nurse found the doctor out in the corridor frowning over Kai Ding's chart.

"He lacks the desire to get well, I think," the doctor commented. "That poor skinny leg has not a chance in the world to heal, while he lies there so impassive and listless." She eyed the nurse questioningly.

"It's his dreams that trouble him most," she replied. Then her face brightened. "Do you suppose it's Anne he wants? He calls out for her in his sleep, his face all twisted with suffering. I remember she said he had been sort of a special pet of hers ever since she first started teaching him how to read. You remember? When she was having such an awful struggle over the written language herself — and hating it so — this young individual came over quite confidently and asked her to teach him how to read, because she was so slow herself! After that she

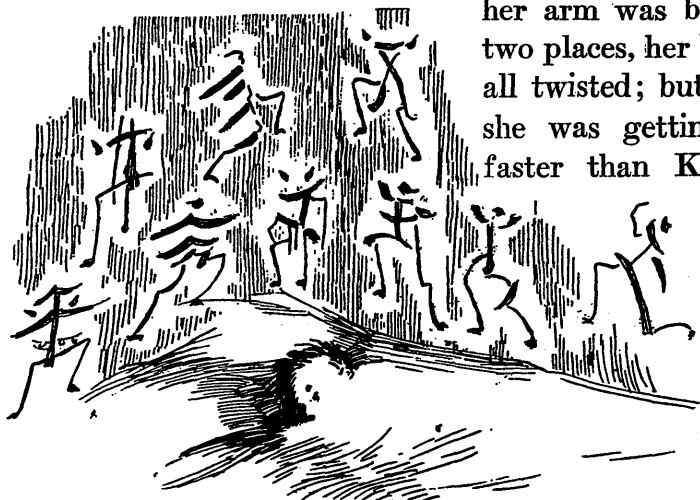
had to work hard through the week to learn enough to keep ahead of him. Perhaps he wants to see her and is too sensitive to ask. There is something he wants to know, but he *will* not ask. He just lies there — so little and appealing — with a face a century old."

"M-m-m," mused the doctor. "That may be it. It is obviously something mental. I don't know. Of course it is perfectly possible for a ten-year-old child to live into the life of an older person with tremendous depth and feeling; more than we often realize. We might roll his bed out on to her porch. Suppose you ask Anne? She's so restless herself now, that a little diversion will do her good. How about the casters on his bed? Smooth enough, you think?"

Had Kai Ding but known, his beloved Sugu was scarcely five doors away from him all this long time. To be sure her head had a huge gash,

her arm was broken in two places, her back was all twisted; but even so she was getting along faster than Kai Ding

with that pitifully thin



leg. Only now she was so sick of lying in bed that she fairly exploded at the nurse every time she appeared in the doorway. This time, however, when the subject of moving Kai Ding was broached, it was far more than mere interest that shone from Anne Holway's eyes.

"Of course I want to see him. Bring his bed out here this minute. You two! He's lonesome, that's all's the matter with him. I'll fix that. Bless his tiny heart! Roll him out."

They did — not even bothering to explain to poor Kai Ding, who closed his eyes when they started to move him, not relaxing a single muscle until long after the journey was ended. At every motion of the casters, those dancing characters crushed against him with their excruciating pain. He didn't wish to be moved. The doctor was very kind, of course, and he ought to thank her; but he *did* wish she'd let him alone. There was no one to care, no one. The Sugu —

Suddenly as he lay there, his eyes still closed, he heard a voice or thought he did — the voice above all others in the world that he wanted to hear. And it seemed to come right from beside his bed.

"The day's blessing, Kai Ding, the day's blessing," it said slowly. Motionless he strained his ears for an echo of that well-loved sound.

"Aren't you going to look at me at *all*?" the voice coaxed. After an eternity he managed to unglue his eyelids.

She was there! Actually there beside him, in a bed like his, with bandages covering *her*, looking at him — smiling at him. It had not changed at all, that smile. It lifted him back once more into the safety of her love. As he lay there staring at her, somewhere in the back of his brain the dancing characters crumpled up into an empty heap and faded. They had never been wood or tile or paper even, but just brain sprites that had left him now forever. She was no longer under them. She was here beside him. They could learn together again, now.

"You — are — really here?" he questioned. "Here to stay?"

She laughed gayly. "Indeed, I'm *not* here to stay, Kai Ding. They are building a new church, you know. It will be ready for us when the summer is over, so we must hurry to get well and learn lots and lots before the fall. Shall we?"

"Oh, we shall, we shall," he breathed. "We must be there when they open it."

They did and they were. Even so it was rather late in the year when the new church finally stood ready, and the two of them were strong enough to be there. On the opening Sunday, Kai Ding

stood proudly on the church steps admiring the building. His mother had come with him!

"See," he was explaining, "see the paint is all so bright and red. And how beautifully the roof curves. Let us go in." Once inside, however, Kai Ding felt a bit unseay at so much strangeness. Instead of the old pastor, a strong-voiced young theolog stood behind the pulpit. After a few minutes, the shuffling subsided. The preacher opened his hymnal.

"Let us begin our worship," he announced, "by singing 'Lo! the joyful sound.'"

The same hymn! "86 — 86 —" Kai Ding whisked happily through the pages of his book. Once more, his place found, the light of his face shone toward the Sugu whose head was still bent. At last, her hymnal ready and in place, she turned to him and smiled. With the rest of the congregation Kai Ding slipped to his feet. A full-sized tone issued from the baby organ — and the praise of God began.





UNFAMILIAR WORDS OR TERMS

Sugu (Seegoo) — a foreign unmarried lady teacher. We say in China, "There are men, women, and Sugus."

Sing Sang (SeeNan) — Mr., used for Chinese or a foreign gentleman.

Bing Ong (The day's blessing) — the Christian salutation, which street children often call out as foreigners walk past.

Ai-ja or *ya* — oh, my; sometimes, alas.

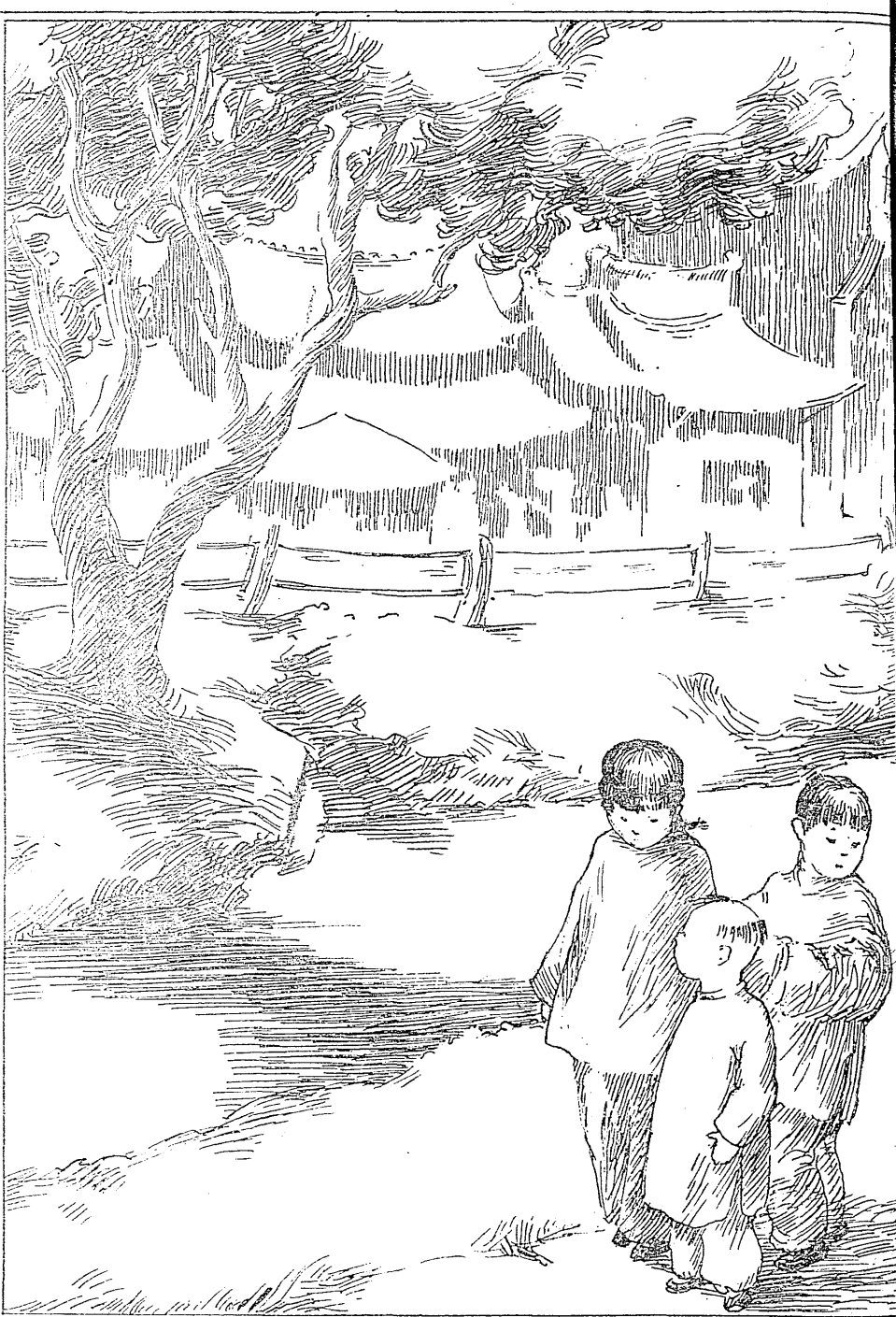
Tracoma — a disease of the eyes, common in Fukien.

Cash — the smallest division of money, considerably less than our penny. Several cash make one copper.

Characters — the letters of the Chinese written language.

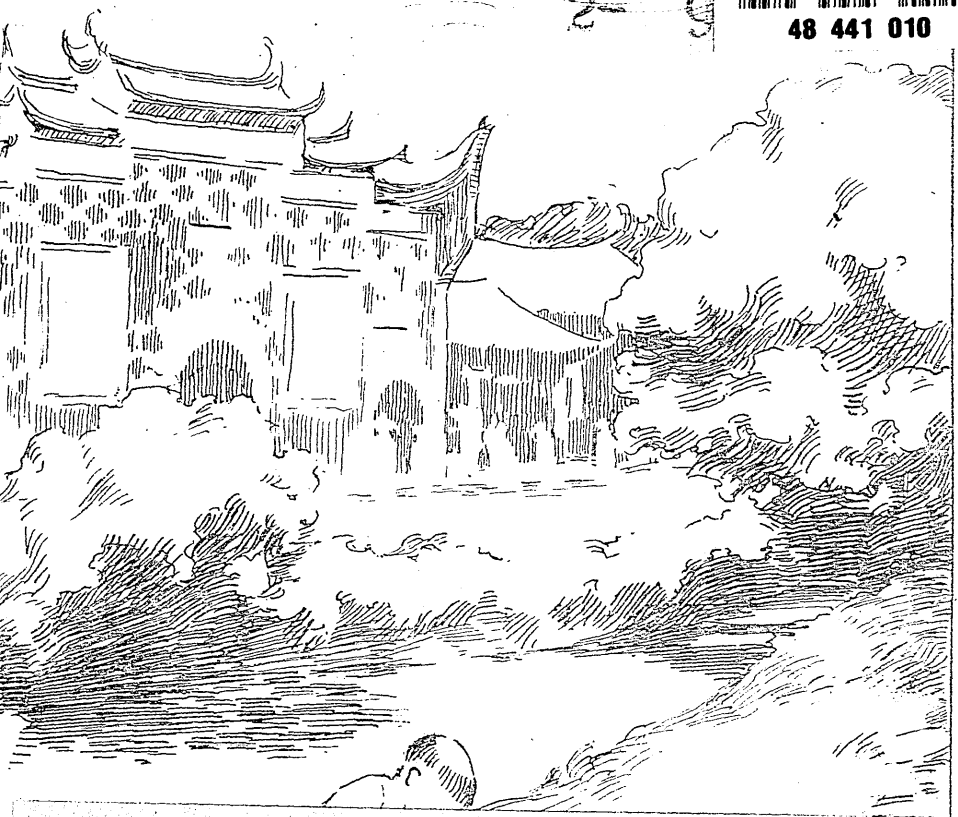
Foreign devils — a street term used by the more ignorant for foreign people. The Chinese themselves sometimes deny this meaning. The more literal translation is, I believe, "son of a foreign dog."

Chinese New Year — comes usually the latter part of January or early in February, depending on the moon. During the year are monthly holidays, when the people offer sacrifices of food and have special delicacies to accompany their usual rice.





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